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DRIFTING

(WITH BROWNE)

BYERS FLETCHER

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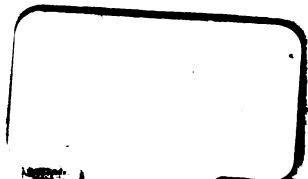
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D R I F T I N G
(WITH BROWNE)

DRIFTING (WITH BROWNE)

BY
BYERS FLETCHER

*" Just drop your oars and drift a while,
Relax your face and let it smile "*

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DRIFTING (WITH BROWNE)

CHAPTER I

JAMES WAYINTON BROWNE had an idea. It came to him suddenly, spontaneously. It was a brilliant, a splendid idea. It was an idea which stood out from his drifting thoughts even as the extreme peak of the Matterhorn sometimes stands out stark and splendid above the eddying clouds below the summit. It was an idea pregnant with possibilities. It bathed his mentality in an aurora of rose and gold.

Kindly note that the foregoing is James Wayinton Browne's description of his idea, not mine.

The idea, he said, awoke him from one of the soundest sleeps he had ever experienced, and left him quivering on the borderland between consciousness and unconsciousness grasping the idea with all the mental energy he possessed at that moment. Even in his semi-awake condition, he realized that not a moment was to be lost if the idea was to be retained. He must jot it down while it still nestled rose-tinted and golden-hued in his thought, even as the artist in feverish haste works with his brush and colours to catch the glories of the fleeting sunset ere they fade for ever away.

These paragraphs are also faithful reproductions

from James Wayinton Browne's narrative. Browne was oft-times prodigal with his flowers of speech. I have sometimes sat entranced, while perfect bouquets of language issued from his lips. On one occasion, I said, "Jimmy, where *does* it come from?"

"Where does what come from?" he asked.

"Your elegant language, your well-rounded periods, your polished sentences, your flowery descriptions?"

He laughed, and his reply seemed to be quite impromptu: "Flowers of speech spring from bulbs of poetic fancy planted in a fertile imagination."

Just like that! He did not seem to hesitate or to choose his words, they simply flowed out. I remember we were lunching together at the time, and I gazed at him in awe and admiration. He noticed my awe-struck condition, he took pity on me, he came down to my level. He said, "Pass the cheese, old chap." I felt easier at once. There was this delightful characteristic about Browne; he could at will take mental skyward flights with those possessing Pegasean wings, or, at a moment's notice, he could and would descend to tread the common dust of earth with us of wingless nature.

However, it will perhaps consume more time if I continue Browne's narrative as much as possible in my own blossomless style, for after all it is the consumption of time which makes up our days and nights, and the more time we consume the more days and nights we have, and the more days and nights we have the longer we live, and the longer we live the more time we have to consume, and the

more time we consume the more days and nights we have, and the more—I fear the argument is becoming involved, and I seem to be drifting in a circle. At any rate, what happened to Browne really does not lend itself to flowery description, however pleasing and brief such a description may be.

What happened was this :

Impressed with the necessity of preserving the great idea which had come to him, Browne arose from a recumbent position on his bed, and stretched out his hand to find the switch of his reading-lamp which stood on a small table at his bedside. I think he was still fast asleep, but Browne declared he was not. He said he always kept a notebook and pencil on that table for jotting purposes. He said it was not the first time that valuable ideas had come to him at night, and the faithful notebook received the shivering, new-born ideas into its leafy shelter, where they were kept safe and warm for him until the morning. His purpose, therefore, in turning on the light was to find the notebook aforesaid.

However, on the table was also an alarm-clock, and Browne found the clock before he found the lamp or the notebook. The table being small, the clock toppled off and fell towards the floor. I say "towards the floor" advisedly, as the clock did not reach the floor immediately. It was a good alarm-clock, and it did its best to live up to its name. It created considerable alarm.

Browne owned a dog. It was just a common or garden dog, but it refused to stop in the garden, partly because it had no garden in which to stop

(Browne lived in a bachelor's flat), but mainly for the reason that it loved to be near Browne. Browne said, every night before he went to bed, he made it a point of duty to see that Ajax was curled up snugly in his basket near the umbrella-stand in the hall, and that he, Browne, never awoke during the night or in the morning without finding Ajax camping on his bed, or under his bed, or by the side of his bed. Ajax seemed to love his master. I do not know why, any more than I know why my dog loves me. I sometimes imagine that neither of us are worthy of their love. I think Browne loves Ajax in a mild sort of way, but not in the way Ajax loves him. For instance, I do not think Browne would leave his cosy bed in the middle of the night, and lie down on the floor of the hall beside the basket of Ajax, just because he loved Ajax. Not only would he not do such a thing, but I am convinced he would not even *think* of doing it. Some men are like that. It isn't exactly selfishness, it isn't ordinary thoughtlessness, it is—of course, I do not mean to say that I would sleep on the floor of the hall just to be near my dog. In fact, the situation does not arise. My dog has no basket. From his puppyhood, he established his sleeping-quarters on the foot-end of my bed, and I could'nt show my love for him by sleeping on the floor of the hall, even if I wanted to. But it was different with Browne; he had an opportunity of showing reciprocal love for Ajax, an opportunity which I fear he neglected. However, that was his own affair.

On this particular night, Ajax had as usual deserted his basket and was sleeping on the floor

beside his master's bed. The alarm-clock reached Ajax before it reached the floor. It is the business of a good alarm-clock to make a noise, but on this occasion it did not make all the noise. Ajax assisted. It is quite probable that Ajax, thus rudely awakened, did not know what had occurred, but it is not within

Ajax camping on his bed



the limited scope of human ken to know why he conceived it to be his immediate duty to bound across the room, thrust his head out of the open window (it was in the summer-time), and howl at the top of his voice. And the top of Ajax' voice, Browne said, was something to be reckoned with. He said had he not known that it was the voice of Ajax which caused that weird and awful noise, it would have frozen the marrow in his bones! As it was, for quite a few moments, he was paralysed into complete inactivity.

Ajax' vocal efforts, however, had quite a different effect on a spinster lady who lived in a flat above Browne's. She heard the noise, her blood congealed,

but she was not rendered physically inactive. She could not, of course, know what was happening in the flat below, but she had an intuition that it was something which should receive the immediate attention of the police.



On the opposite side of the street, a policeman stood leaning against a tree, thinking. For the past half-hour he had been there in the same position. It is, no doubt, generally known that the vocation of a policeman requires deep thinking, but it is unfortunate that, combined with deep thought, a prolonged stationary attitude should seem necessary. The combination invites suspicion, and the invitation is often accepted by people who do not think, but only observe.

The spinster lady said she put her head out of the window and called (she denied having shrieked) "Police!" The thinking policeman across the street after a while became conscious of the spinster lady calling (shrieking, he termed it), but the word he heard was "Fire!"

Now, there is not the least similarity between the words, yet the maiden lady called "Police!" and the policeman heard "Fire!" The policeman told the Inspector next day that he had thought deeply about the matter, but he could not understand why the word "Police" should have changed to "Fire" just in crossing the street. He said it puzzled him completely. "A fair knock-out," was his precise description. The Inspector was also an Irishman, and, fixing his cold, cold-gaze on the policeman, he said, "If the word 'Police' gets changed to 'Fire' agin when ye're on yer beat, Moloney, 'tis yer own

'fire' that will be occurin' nixt, and ye'll be put out without the aid of the Fire Brigade!" Moloney, being well trained in discipline, did not allow his thoughts to slip forth in words. He merely replied, "Yis, sir," and saluted.

To return to the previous night. Moloney, aroused from his meditations, distinctly heard the lady calling (shrieking) "Fire!" Conceiving it to be his duty to transmit the intelligence to the Fire Brigade without loss of time, he sprinted towards the nearest fire-alarm box, third turning to the right, second to the left. In the meantime, things were still happening in Browne's flat.

Ajax, in bounding to his feet, had overturned the bedside table, and put the electric lamp out of action. Browne, now out of bed, was groping on the floor searching for the fallen lamp. His fingers found a box of matches which he usually kept on the table. He struck a match, its head burst into flame, broke off and fell upon a woolly hearth-rug. It likewise burst into flame. Browne said his first impulse was to stamp out the fire with his feet, but one stamp with one bare foot was enough to stifle the impulse, but not the fire. He then ran swiftly across the room, as swiftly as he could on one foot, found the water-pitcher, turned, collided with the bed-post, broke the pitcher, drenched his pyjamas, and the howls of Ajax increased in violence.



On the opposite side of the street, a policeman stood leaning against a tree, thinking

Browne kept his head. Almost any other man, and indeed some women, would at that juncture have thrust his or her head out of the window and yelled 'Fire!' But Browne did not. He saw at once the uselessness of pitting his voice against the voice of Ajax. Seizing the fire-irons, he jammed the flaming rug into the grate and let it burn. A considerable amount of smoke filled the room, and as soon as Ajax could be persuaded to leave the window, Browne began to fan the smoke out of the room through the window. This was the psychological moment chosen by the Fire Brigade for its arrival. It was an imposing turn-out, including three engines, several fire-escapes, a water-tower, hose-wagons, and other useful accessories.

The spinster lady was rescued first. She objected to being carried down the escape in her night attire, but the fireman was there for the sole purpose of rescuing her, and wouldn't stand any nonsense. His manly breast was as yet unadorned by a medal, and it was not reasonable to expect him to let such a spectacular chance slip smoothly by.

Browne, busily engaged in freeing his room of the smoke, and his sense of hearing being fully occupied with the howls of Ajax, was not aware of the arrival of the Fire Brigade. The first intimation he had of its presence was when the end of a ladder smashed in the frame-work of his window, and in half a minute more, the brass nozzle of a hose-pipe protruded into his room. Browne said he was dumb-founded, and his vocal organs refused to work. It was Ajax who saved the situation. It was Ajax who ceased howling and sprang at the intruder. It was

Ajax who arose in his wrath and also on his hind legs, grasped the brass nozzle in firm-set jaws, and tried to bite its end off! Ajax should have all possible credit for his excellent intention, but, like many other excellent intentions, it did not "make good," for at that moment a fireman, also with excellent intentions, turned on the water. Ajax, for a brief moment, "drank deep of the flowing stream." Then he and the stream went away together; not far, only to the opposite wall, Ajax heading the stream.

When Ajax came to a full stop against the opposite wall, his feelings were hurt, but he was not surprised. He had got beyond the point of being surprised. So many unusual things were happening, it was hardly any use being surprised. He was only hurt, he accepted the situation, he howled no longer, he was too full for utterance. Browne said Ajax was not merely wet, he was saturated. For several days, when he patted him, the water would ooze from Ajax like a sponge. Browne said the word which best described Ajax' condition was "sodden." It was a week before Ajax again developed a normal thirst. His system did not seem to require moisture.

It was some few minutes before Browne could convince the fireman at the window that there was no fire, and that it was undesirable to make a swimming-pool of his bedroom. Then the water was turned off, the hose reluctantly wound up, and the "tumult died away in the distance." The Irish Police-Inspector, armed with a notebook, interviewed Browne, and about this time Higgins appeared on the scene. Higgins was Browne's

valet. He slept in a room at the other end of the hall. Higgins never believed in spending a long time in bed every night. He said from eight to ten hours was quite enough for any man, but when he did sleep he was thankful to say he was a sound sleeper. What Higgins really meant was that he was a sound-proof sleeper. Sound-waves of great size and variety had surged around Higgins that eventful night, and beat in vain against the closed door of his consciousness. Higgins slept on. He finally appeared on the scene because Browne went to him and requested his appearance. Browne used the word "requested," but I doubt whether Browne was at that moment in a frame of mind to have requested anybody to do anything. Certainly his request to the Police-Inspector to retire and leave him alone was not expressed in language calculated to charm an official whose birthplace was Ireland, and whose hair was red. At any rate, Higgins came promptly, and Browne said, for the first time in his experience, Higgins betrayed human emotion when he saw the condition of that bedroom. But Higgins was a man of resource, and it was not long before Browne, clad in dry garments, was tucked away on the Chesterfield in the drawing-room, while Ajax was tucked away in his basket in the hall as dry as could be expected, provided you did not expect too much dryness.

Browne spent an uncomfortable remainder of the night. His sleep was troubled, and as the grey dawn began to creep into his room, he dreamed. Curious how the grey dawn always creeps into one's room. Sunshine as a rule bursts in, but the grey

dawn always slinks in as though it was ashamed of having been out all night. As I was saying, Browne dreamed as the grey dawn crept into his room. He dreamt that somewhere on the coast of the Arctic ocean he was standing with bare legs in the icy water, fishing with a fly-rod for walrus. Then he awoke. It was only Ajax camping on his legs, oozing and shivering.

Browne said it was not until he was seated at breakfast, indeed, it was not until he had consumed two eggs and a rasher, that he was able to consider the events of the previous night connectedly. Step by step he mentally retraced his experiences, until he came to the point where he had stretched out his hand to turn on the electric light. Then he remembered ! The idea ! That splendid idea which had come to him ! Again the aurora of rose and gold bathed his mentality. He paused in the act of munching a piece of toast and tried to remember what the idea was. He couldn't. He completed the mastication of the toast, and tried again to recall the idea. It refused to be recalled. He took a gulp of coffee, shook himself mentally, and concentrated his thought. No use. " This is absurd ! " he said. He tried to stimulate his remembrance with another slice of toast and marmalade. It only seemed to render the void more empty. " A full stomach maketh a light head," he misquoted. He arose from the table and walked across the room. The other events of the night stood out with unabated clearness. He could even remember what the Chief of the Fire Brigade said when he found there was no fire from a fireman's point of view. He even remem-

bered his effort to extinguish the blaze on the rug with his bare foot. When he remembered that, his walk changed to a limp. He wandered into his bedroom and tried to reconstruct the scene as it was before the alarm-clock started the earthquake. It was impossible. Only a decorator, several decorators, could reconstruct the scene. It was a summer morning, but the desolation of that room chilled him. He sought the companionship of Ajax, patted him absent-mindedly for a while, then wiped his wet hand on his napkin, and meandered up and down the hall. All to no purpose, the idea was lost! "Lost," as Browne said bitterly, "even before it was discovered!" The glorious colour-scheme of rose and gold faded from his consciousness, and left instead, a daub of dreary grey streaked with black and yellow.

Then Browne began to worry, and quickly amassed a mental burden which he felt unable to carry without assistance. Then Browne thought of me. A certain Good Book commands us to bear one another's burdens. Browne believed in half the command at least. He believed in others helping to bear his burdens. He considered it good for them as tending to inculcate charity and self-sacrifice. He seemed pleased when he could afford them opportunities for practising these virtues. He was not always so certain about the other half of the command. Of course, he did not absolutely refuse to do burden-bearing for others, not a point-blank refusal, but he, like many of us, when he saw a burden-bearer approaching who obviously intended to transfer his load to another's shoulders, sometimes side-stepped round a corner, or ran for a bus. I do

not mean to say that Browne never did bear another's burden. On the contrary, I have seen him more than once take a burden from another's shoulders, not very cheerfully perhaps, and move off with it, groaning perhaps a little louder than was absolutely necessary, but he carried it until the conditions enabled him to dump it into the dust-bin of forgetfulness which a kindly Providence has stationed for that purpose at convenient intervals along the road of Life.

As I have said, Browne thought of me.

CHAPTER II

BROWNE was a business man. I believe he inherited something in the City. I do not think I ever knew the exact nature of his business. He once told me he sat on a good many Boards, and for a while I entertained a misty idea that he was in the timber trade. The fact of his office being in Wood Street rather strengthened the idea, I imagine, and I took it for granted, without anything more tangible to substantiate it, that he was concerned about lumber and shingles and two-by-fours, or whatever one is concerned about in this particular trade.

I remember asking him one day about the state of the timber business. I didn't really want to know. I had no interest whatever in the business. It was only that in the course of our conversation, it seemed my turn to say something, and I could not for the moment think of anything else to say. Browne said he hadn't the slightest idea how the timber business was. I expressed polite surprise in the usual way by saying, "Really!"

"Is it a joke?" Browne asked, smiling.

"No, really," I replied. Then I told him why I imagined he was in the timber trade.

Browne indulged for a moment in one of his high-explosive laughs, then said, "Come to think about it, you are pretty near right. Boards do remind

one of the timber business. Some Boards I sit on are well planed and smooth, and others have knots in them. I know a few that have splinters in them too, and when you sit on those kind of Boards, you have to move very cautiously. Some Boards are made of dry timber, straight-grained and well-seasoned. It's easy to sit on those kind. But when you sit on a green Board, it warps and cracks and takes a lot of hot-air to straighten it out. You earn your money when you sit on a Board of that character! And you don't sit, as a rule, you stand most of the time and shake your fist!"

When Browne said that, I was reminded of the only Board meeting I ever attended. It was in the days of the Rubber Boom. If I remember rightly, I received by post the Prospectuses of four hundred and thirty-seven different companies. I never understood why the other infant Rubber companies which were hatched at that period did not hear of me and send me their prospectuses. However, after faithfully reading the four hundred and thirty-seven prospectuses, I decided to invest my accumulated savings in one particular Company. I did not pick and choose this particular Company because of any "inside information." In fact, I knew nothing whatever about any of them, except what was told me by the prospectuses, and as far as an ordinary man, such as myself, could judge, the prospect in each case was sun-kissed and rainbow-hued.

I determined to invest in Rubber shares simply because I felt I could no longer stand idly aside and see fortunes amassed by friends and acquaintances without making at least one effort to do likewise.

Feeling this, I also determined not to wade merely ankle-deep with the timid ones on the shore of Fortune; I would take the Grand Plunge! In other words, I would invest all my savings, for I felt that Opportunity had knocked loudly at my door. Indeed, I fancied I could detect a decided indentation on the panels.

One day, I wrote the names of the four hundred and thirty-seven companies on separate slips of paper, folded them up, dumped the lot into the wastebasket, and shook them about. Then I put in my hand, drew forth one slip, and thus let Fate decide where I should invest my twenty-seven pounds! The name on the fateful slip I drew was "The Hulu-Hulu Rubber Co., Ltd." Its prospectus stated that its plantation of 300,000 rubber-trees (to be planted), was situated in the Typee Valley on the Marquesas Islands in the South Seas.

The par value of this Company's shares was two shillings, but when I tried to buy some the next day, I found that none were to be obtained under seventeen shillings. Here was proof of the wisdom of my choice. A two-shilling share standing at seventeen shillings plainly showed that others recognized a good thing when they saw it. I bought at once, before they had a chance to go any higher. After stamp duty, broker's charges, contango, carry-over, goodwill, transfers, auditing, and other usual charges had been paid, I received in due course of time (three months, I think), a beautifully engraved certificate stating that I was the proud owner of thirty shares in the "Hulu-Hulu Rubber Co., Ltd."

I was not so proud as I might have been earlier,

as by the time I received the certificate, the shares were quoted on 'Change at six shillings and fourpence, and as time went on, the dwindling of my pride in the shares kept well ahead of the dwindle in their value. When they reached fivepence-ha'penny, my pride in them had entirely vanished, and a stern curiosity had taken its place. I wanted to know something about the "Hulu-Hulu Rubber Co., Ltd.," something apart from and more definite than the information conveyed in its prospectus. I sallied forth and found the offices "somewhere in the City." They were on the top floor of a building innocent of dangerous lifts, but accessible by stairways which had seen better days, in ancient times when the world was younger. The "Hulu-Hulu" office-boy had not been washed lately, but he harmonized with the outer office. As one might say, they blended.

In answer to my inquiry, the office-boy said gloomily, "The bosses are in there," and pointed to a door upon which was painted the words "Board Room." I know now that I ought not to have entered that room without an invitation, and the office-boy knew it then, but said nothing. He told me afterwards that he had not been paid his salary ("salary" was the word he used to describe his five shillings a week) for three weeks, and he didn't care what happened.

So I innocently opened the door of the Board Room and looked in. Gathered about a long table were seven men. Some were sitting, some standing, all were talking. So intent were they on the business before them that I was not noticed. Their con-

B

versation was in a high-keyed note, and I soon became aware that it was a Board meeting of the "Hulu-Hulu Rubber Co., Ltd." I became interested in their conversation. I entered the room and attended the meeting. I mean to say, I stood unnoticed just inside the door. I imagine they were dimly conscious of some one being there, but thought it was the office-boy, and evidently he didn't count. I was glad I was unnoticed, as I did not wish them to interrupt their conversation on my account. I felt that they would talk more freely if I was not officially present.

I gathered that the chairman's Christian name (or, rather, front name) was Abraham, and as one Director was called Ikey, and another Jakey, I assumed that the patriarchal family group was complete. Other Directors were evidently called by nicknames, such as, "Fathead," "Damphool," and "Guinea-pig." It seemed, as far as I could judge from their conversation, that they were about to wind up the Company. The string upon which the shareholders dangled, had become somewhat tangled and snarled, and there was trouble on the Board in regard to the division of the spoils.

The Director named Ikey stood up suddenly, and shook his finger at Abraham, and said, "Who vas it what suggested the Typee Valley in the Mars-queezeus for the plantation? A place so far away that nobody can't examine it, and make interferences. Vas it me, or vas it not!"

The other six Directors hastened to assure Ikey that it was not he who suggested the Typee Valley. Each of the other six claimed the honour

in different vocal keys, and the loudest claimant was Jakey.

"It vas me! It vas me!" shouted Jakey, attempting to convince the others by sheer lung-power proof.

"You!" cried Ikey, scornfully. "You, what thought the Typee Valley vas in Switzerland yet!



"Who vas it what suggested the Typee Valley in the Marsqueecus for the plantation!"

You are a fine romancer!" Only he didn't use the word "romancer."

"Shut up!" roared Abraham, thumping with his fist on the table. "You fellers give me a pain in my inside yet! It vas me who got up the prospectus, ain't it? (Thump.) It vas me what formed the Company, ain't it? (Thump.) It vas me what give you fellers a chance, ain't it not? (Two thumps.) When it comes to a show-down, what have you fellers got against my hand, eh? Nothink!"

Each of the other six "fellers" seemed to think

he had a pretty fair hand, and "Fathead" proceeded to show his hand bunched up and quite close to Abraham's nose.

To what extremity this interesting conversation would have carried the Board, I do not know, as I inadvertently stopped it. I sneezed. Seven pairs of eyes bored through me, and seven mouths closed with a snap. Indeed, the Director nicknamed "Guinea-pig," who had been performing the difficult feat of talking loudly and rapidly with a lighted cigar between his teeth, closed his mouth so promptly and forcibly that he bit through his cigar, the lighted part of which fell unheeded upon the table. It was an embarrassing moment for me. I hate to be a kill-joy at any happy gathering.

The silent seven had but one question to ask, but there was no need for vocal utterance. The one question glared forth from each of the seven pairs of eyes. There was no mistaking the question. It was, "How long has he been here?" I thought I had better answer the question. I stepped forward and said, "Good morning. I am a shareholder in the 'Hulu-Hulu Company,' and I would like to know what the shares are worth to-day." Each of the seven Directors looked at each other, then six looked at Abraham.

"How many shares have you got?" asked Abraham at last, his voice subdued and husky.

"Thirty," I replied, producing the certificate.

"How much did you pay for 'em?" asked Abraham, looking somewhat relieved, I thought.

"Twenty-seven pounds," I answered.

There was an audible snicker from Ikey, quenched

suddenly, I am almost certain, by a kick on the shin from Abraham.

"Do you want to sell 'em?" asked Abraham.

"If I can get my price," I replied.

"How much do you want for 'em?" asked Abraham.

"Twenty-seven pounds," I said.

Six pairs of eyes turned towards heaven, and six pairs of hands went up in expostulation, but Abraham made no sign.

"And six months' interest at five per cent.," I went on.

Six voices clashed in unintelligible mutters of remonstrance, but Abraham was silent. I gained courage and continued, "Travelling expenses, bus fares, tips to servants, petty cash——"

"Vait, vait!" cried Abraham, roused into action. He reached into an inner pocket, produced a roll of bank-notes, laid three ten-pound notes on the table, and said, "Forget the other expenses, and I give you thirty pounds for the shares, is it?"

"It is," I replied, handing him the certificate and gathering up the notes. The other Directors watched the proceedings in dazed silence.

"Good morning, gentlemen," I said. "I am sorry to have interrupted your Board meeting."

Abraham smiled. It wasn't exactly a sunny smile. It was a composite smile evincing some relief, a little admiration, and considerable chagrin.

"If you would have come a little later," he said, "maybe it is you would have seen us declaring a dividend yet."

He held out his hand, but as both of mine were

occupied, one in holding the notes, and the other my hat, I did not take the extended palm. An impulse came to me to use one of my feet in farewell greeting to Abraham, but I resisted the impulse. I felt he would misunderstand, and I hate misunderstandings.

So I came away. I do not know what happened on that splintered, split, knotty, and cross-grained Board after I left, but I am reasonably certain of two things, viz. that the graceful Hulu-Hulu dancers of the Marquesas will never repose in the shade of those 300,000 to-be-planted rubber-trees in the Typee Valley, and, that the gloomy, unwashed office-boy never received his arrears of salary.

When I invested my savings in rubber shares, I was much criticized because of the manner in which I chose my Company. Most of my friends waxed hilarious when they heard about it. My friend Jones, who is universally acknowledged to be much more clever than I am, was almost offensive in his condemnation of my method of choosing a Company. He had great difficulty in concealing his contempt for me. Indeed, it broke forth occasionally and defied concealment.

"My dear fellow," said Jones, in his pitying, patronizing tone which I knew so well, "your method of choosing a Company for the investment of your capital is against all the elementary dictates of reason. Fate has nothing to do with business. Your method is simply piffle! It would be funny if it was not so sad. You need a guardian. 'A fool and his money,' you know. There is but one safe and sure method of choosing a Rubber Company."

Then he went on to explain the necessity of careful, intelligent investigation. He said it was only after days of most strenuous inquiries concerning situation, climatic conditions, cost of labour, facilities for curing and transportation, management, cost of planting, cultivation, gathering, etc., that he had



He proved to me with the aid of pencil and paper

chosen his Company. He left nothing to chance. When he invested his spare capital, he demanded a sure thing. Therefore he had chosen the "Bumpity-Bump Rubber Co., Ltd., of the Straits Settlements." To be sure, he had paid fifteen shillings each for the two-shilling shares, but he proved to me with the aid of pencil and paper, that even if the market value of rubber declined to tenpence per pound, the enormous amount of rubber produced by this plantation would in three years' time send "Bumpity-Bump" shares up to fifty shillings. He said he intended holding them until they reached that figure.

It was one of the finest pieces of logical reasoning I

'had ever heard, and had I not already invested my savings in "Hulu-Hulus," I am convinced that nothing could have prevented me from buying "Bumpity-Bumps."

Several months after my attendance at the "Hulu-Hulu" Board meeting, I came across Jones at the Club, and it occurred to me to ask about "Bumpity-Bumps." I did so.

"I don't know anything about them," said Jones, shortly. "I sold my shares some time ago."

"Wonderful!" I said. "It has been scarcely two years since you bought them. I congratulate you. Of course, you got your price—fifty shillings, wasn't it?"

"I sold them at one and ninepence," replied Jones, and abruptly changed the subject.

I was amazed. I wanted to know more about it. I wanted to know how it was possible for such a brilliant piece of logical reasoning to go wrong. I wanted to see the flaw, the fly in the amber, the angle-worm in the nectar, and incidentally I wanted to boast a little about my own financial coup in "Hulu-Hulus." But Jones would not be drawn. He said the conditions were highly complicated. He was certain I would not understand, even if he attempted an explanation. Besides, he had an important engagement, and he tore himself away.

For a long time, I occasionally pondered over Jones's financial debacle in "Bumpity-Bumps." Then, one day in Piccadilly, I met my friend Green.

Green is an American who at uncertain periods turns up in London. He always comes on business,

so he says, but intimacy for several years with Green has led me to believe that his business trips to England partake somewhat of the following nature: He starts from New York on the fastest ship available, imbued with but one thought—business! Nothing else, he thinks, could possibly tempt him to leave his office in the sky-scraper where the roar of the throbbing pulse of Broadway proclaimed to him all day long that he was in the heart of affairs with “something doing” every moment. He believes he hates the ocean and everything connected with it. His one idea is to cross as quickly as possible, run up to London, settle the business in hand as expeditiously as English business methods will allow, then, shake the mud of the Mother Country from off his shoes, and take the first boat back to good old New York.

“England?” he would say. “Oh, yes, nice quiet country if you want to take a nap, but for a business man——”

When the steamer docks at Liverpool, Green is the first passenger down the gang-plank, and he impatiently begrudges the time necessary to declare to the custom official that he has nothing dangerous or dutiable in his two suit-cases. On the way up to London, he glances occasionally out of the window at the passing country scenery, more to judge the rate of speed at which the train is running than for any other reason, but mainly he is occupied with arrangement of letters and documents preparatory to business interviews in London. His first day in London is a sample of New York hustle. He stops for lunch and dinner, only because the time arrives

at which those meals are to be eaten (nothing under heaven could make him stop for tea), but even at his meals he discourses about deals and propositions, and I doubt if he is conscious of what he is eating.

Green makes a point of looking me up when he comes to London, and we frequently lunch and dine together. He is a good talker. I sometimes wish I could imitate his easy flow of language. I said as much to him one day.

"Talk?" he cried. "Why, any old phonograph can talk! Just mechanism and motive power. That's me. But a good listener is a rare article, I guess—to me, anyway." I think perhaps that is why Green and I get on so well together. He likes to talk, and I like to listen to him.

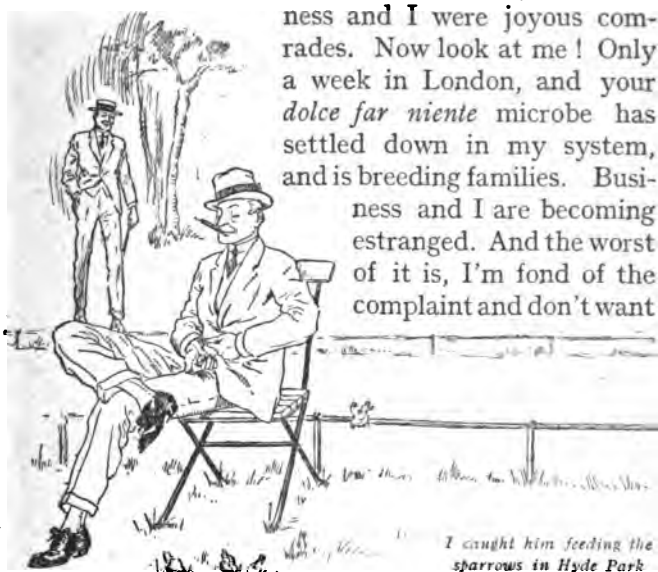
For the first three or four days after his arrival in London, the New York hustle prevails, then I begin to discern a change in him. He lingers over his lunch, and his talk is no longer confined to business. He becomes interested in the theatres and music-halls. He drops in at the Club where he is a well-known and welcome guest. He joins the throng in the shopping districts, and is interested in the window displays. He motors into the country, and lingers at the wayside inns. At one time, after he had been a week in London, I caught him feeding the sparrows in Hyde Park at a time of day when, by all the rules of New York business life, he should have been deep in the intricacies of some financial deal. He smiled sheepishly when he saw me.

"Got it again!" he said.

"Got what?" I asked.

"Londonitis! Same old complaint. Left New

York thinking I was the live-wire business boy of the Metropolis. Why, I could resurrect any old dead and buried scheme, and turn it into a scintillating financial success, just for the fun of doing it. Busi-



ness and I were joyous comrades. Now look at me! Only a week in London, and your *dolce far niente* microbe has settled down in my system, and is breeding families. Business and I are becoming estranged. And the worst of it is, I'm fond of the complaint and don't want

to cure it. The longer I have it the worse it gets, and the more I like it! Yes, sir, if they don't send me a come-quick cable from New York and scare this 'Londonitis' out of me soon, you'll hear Billy Green shouting 'This is the Life!'

It was a beautiful day in early summer when I met Green in Piccadilly. He had been in England about two weeks, but as I had been out of town, it was our first meeting since his arrival. He was placidly, calmly, but intensely happy. I could see

that "Londonitis" had been at work on him again, and that New York and business were mere shifting visions on an otherwise untroubled horizon. He was glad to see me, said I was the one thing necessary to complete his enjoyment of this summer day, and I must lunch with him. It needed no force to compel me to do so. It was at the end of our lunch, while we lingered in conversation over our coffee, that the thought came to me to ask Green his opinion as to the failure of Jones's logical reasoning about "Bumpity-Bumps." Green smoked his cigar thoughtfully as I described as near as possible in Jones's own words his reasons for buying "Bumpity-Bump" shares, and then I told of the disastrous breakdown of the beautiful piece of logic. When I had finished, Green chuckled.

"I never was acquainted with the "Bumpity-Bump Co." he said, "but your friend's experience reminds me of old farmer Stubbins and a mule. Did I ever inflict the story on you?"

"No," I said.

"Would you like to hear it?" he asked.

Having acquired a few of Green's American expressions, I replied, "Sure."

"Well," said Green, "it happened when I was a youngish chap travelling for a firm which sold agricultural machinery. The particular machine which I sold and delivered to old Stubbins was a patent corn-sheller. You put the ears of corn (maize, you call it over here) in the machine, set it going, and the shelled corn came out on one side, and the cobs on the other. The motive power was a sort of a treadmill worked by a horse or mule. I set up the machine in

the farmer's barnyard, and it went A 1. The farmer was delighted. The treadmill was worked by a mule, and believe me, it was the finest mule I ever saw. Pure white, without a blemish, and it had the mildest, most angelic eyes ever bestowed on a quadruped. It was the kind of mule you would let your babies play with. 'Faithful, tender and true' was written all over it! I fell in love with it. When it wasn't working, I caressed it, fed it with corn, patted it and smoothed its legs. It was some mule, I tell you! Old farmer Stubbins though was a little nervous about my attentions to the mule. 'Ye want to be a little keerful about that mule,' he said. 'I only bought it yesterday, and it takes mor'n one day to git acquainted with a mule.'

"I laughed at him. 'Why, that mule wouldn't hurt a fly,' I said. 'See here!' And I took hold of the mule's tail, twisted and pulled it, and then slapped the beauty on its hind quarters. The babies' playmate only turned its head and looked at me in a mild, curious sort of way. There wasn't the suspicion of a quiver in its hind legs.

"'I wouldn't do that if I were you,' said old Stubbins, shaking his head. 'Ye're takin' chances. A mule may be an angel, and then agin it may be a varmint. Ye never kin tell!'

"I went into the barn to get another sack of corn and left the old farmer bending over the machine examining its interior. The mule was standing about two paces to the rear of the farmer, facing in the other direction, quietly munching a mouthful of corn. I emerged from the barn doorway just in time to see farmer Stubbins fly over the corn-sheller

propelled by the heels of that angel mule! He sprawled along the ground for a short distance until his bald head came in contact with a beehive which stood against the garden fence. A good few of the bees were at home, three or four came out to ascertain the reason for the jolt, found the reason, anchored themselves to it, and yelled for the others to come. They came, but Stubbins didn't wait for their arrival. Believe me, he made a get-away that, would have been a record, if there had been a stop-watch present to time it! If the three or four bees had not anchored themselves to his shiny dome, they would have been swept off by the breeze the farmer created as he pushed the atmosphere on his way to the duck-pond behind the barn! The other bees simply had no chance. They never got within speaking distance. As Stubbins flew past the barn door, his whiskers streaming out behind his neck, he cast one glance at me and yelled, 'Gol dern it! Ye never kin tell!'

I told this story to Jones one day. I had lured him on to talk about business, companies, and finally 'Bumpity-Bumps.' I told the story pretty well, I thought. I even imported some of Green's accent, and embellished the tale therewith, and at the finish I gave a good imitation of Green's hearty laughter with which he ended the story.

Jones was mildly amused. He said it wasn't bad, but he failed, he said, to see why I interjected the story into the conversation we were having about business. He said he saw no analogy between the subjects. I ventured to explain that companies were like mules in that "you never can tell."

"But I can always tell," said Jones, haughtily.

Very mildly, I suggested that "Bumpity-Bumps" had, as it were, caught him bending. Jones was almost angry.

"Never! You are quite wrong," he said. "The Bumpity-Bump Co. did not catch me bending, as you vulgarly express it. I was broke, but not bent. I never bend!"

There are some men like that. It was no use pressing the matter. I let it go. Business, after all, was a subject with which I had but a passing familiarity, although strangely enough, quite a number of my friends were business men.

I think I have mentioned that Browne was a business man.

CHAPTER III

BROWNE came to see me at my chambers. My chambers are situated about half-way between Browne's office and his flat in Kensington. They offered a convenient stopping-place for him at tea-time, particularly when he desired to unload some mental burden, and at the same time load up with a certain kind of indigestible tea-cake of which he was very fond.

My chambers are not difficult to find if you are familiar with the topography of London, and are careful to follow directions. Leaving the Strand—which is fairly well known to Londoners, although I once knew a dear old lady in Bayswater who proudly boasted that she had never been east of Piccadilly Circus, had no desire to go, and that the Strand was merely a name to her. But then, she had been born and brought up in a mental environment, now happily almost obsolete, which established a sharp line of demarcation between what was called the masses and the classes. Besides, I am almost certain she had forgotten her youthful perambulations along that popular thoroughfare. As I was saying, leaving the Strand not far from Charing Cross Station, you plunge (or go more leisurely, if not pressed for time) into a narrow street which leads towards the Embankment. You

take the second turning to the left, then the first to the right, and continue towards the Embankment until the roar of the Strand has faded to a murmur, or has ceased entirely, depending upon the acuteness of your sense of hearing. You will at this point be close to my chambers, but as there are other buildings in the vicinity, it may be necessary to make inquiries as to which particular building is known as Charingbank Chambers.

When Henry Jarvis retired from service, it was not because he had arrived at an age when his duties as butler had begun to be a burden to himself and a source of irritation to his employer. It was because the establishment which he graced with his services for a goodly number of years had been for him a peculiarly fine source of income. His wages, and particularly the incidental emoluments connected with his position, had enabled him at an age not far beyond the point termed "middle," to retire with a considerable sum. Jarvis had been shrewd as well as saving, and had not been averse to taking financial tips about movements in shares from wealthy visitors to his establishment, tips which pleased and profited him more than the other and more common tips. His retirement had also enabled him to take a wife who had also been in service, and whose saving disposition had endeared her to Jarvis notwithstanding the fact that good looks did not bulk largely among her other excellent qualities. As Jarvis once said, "What I wanted was a 'elpmate, not a parlour horniment."

Blessed therefore with an efficient 'elpmate, Jarvis on his retirement was able to put into operation a

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plan he had had in mind for several years. He secured the lease of a residence which for many quarters had displayed a "To Let" board above its area railings, and I have reason to believe that the terms upon which he secured the lease were mainly Jarvis's. With one eye rigidly fixed on economy, yet with a certain taste, he had re-



Me and Mrs. Jarvis 'ad been debating about the name for the matter of a month

degree of intelligent modelled and furnished the residence for gentlemen's chambers. When the chambers were ready for occupation, he had modestly advertised the fact, mentioning as an additional incentive that tenants could be valeted and catered for in Charingbank

Chambers. Jarvis was rather proud of the name he had bestowed on the chambers.

"Like a flash, as you might say, sir, it come to me one day. Me and Mrs. Jarvis 'ad been debating about the name for the matter of a month. Mrs. Jarvis wanted to call them Bellevue Chambers, she being French on her sister's 'usband's side, but I don't 'old with these foreign ideas. English is good enough for me, I says, sir. Then, one day right here in the 'all while I was watching the paper-'anger, it come to me. 'Ere on the right is Charing Cross, 'ere on the left is the Embankment—Charingbank! It was hobvious, sir!"

I think I was Jarvis's first tenant. I had left

college, not because I had finished my college career crowned with intellectual honours, but because my father's demise suddenly necessitated my doing something for a living. My father having never possessed more than a very hazy idea of business, a haziness which I seemed to have inherited, left his estate in an embarrassed condition. In fact, the estate when confronted by vociferous and menacing creditors, was so embarrassed that it trembled, shrunk, collapsed and almost faded away. When resuscitated by the aid of kindly executors, it was but a feeble, anæmic shadow of itself.

Therefore, my sister Helen, a young girl and motherless, went to live with her aunt in Chelsea, and I went to seek work. Work is a curious chap. I found him in many phases, guises, and moods. Sometimes he liked me, but on more intimate acquaintance, I did not fancy him, and we parted. Sometimes in another guise, I liked him, but the liking was not mutual, and he passed me with a cold stare which betokened that our acquaintance was at an end. Sometimes he was not at home when I called, and sometimes he kept me waiting, standing in the outer hall until my feet were weary and my spirit sore. Sometimes he smiled and sometimes he frowned. Sometimes he cursed and sometimes he blessed. But always I sought him, sought him, hoping one day to find him in a guise through which I might achieve to that Something, that vague, chimerical Something, which mankind calls Success.

About the time the decorators in Charingbank Chambers were moving out and the furnishers were

moving in, Work in the guise of journalism had beckoned to me, smiled at me, and I had gladly rushed into his inky embrace. My paternal grandfather had been a lover and, in a small way, a publisher of books. It is probable that an inherited germ of love for literary work had long lain dormant in my consciousness, to be roused to active and growing energy by this opportunity of seeing myself in print. I entered on my work with enthusiasm. Browne, when he heard of it, said he was not surprised. He said it was only a reversion to type.

The newspaper with which I became connected is now unhappily defunct. At the time of its demise, its esteemed contemporaries politely expressed their regrets, but no half-mast flags were flown. Various causes were assigned for its untimely end, but looking back, I imagine the real cause was an overdose of green journalists producing an acute attack of printers' colic. Certain I am that a good deal of our journalists' work, including my own, had to be re-edited by the printers in the pressroom, and the mental atmosphere of that room was generally heated to such an extent that explosions of language kept pace with the rattle of the linotypes.

It was in this newspaper that I saw Jarvis's advertisement regarding Charingbank Chambers. I was receiving a fair salary, and that, combined with the meagre but certain income from the anæmic estate, caused me to read Jarvis's advertisement with a certain degree of interest. I had long wished for snug quarters of my own. Boarding-houses, even that delectable establishment known

as a "home from home," in course of time pall upon the senses, not to mention the palate. And as for "paying guests," when I remember my experience—but no!—that memory shall not be resuscitated. I dare say there are many people who make delightful "paying guests," and I have no doubt there are delightful hosts who entertain guests for adequate remuneration. My experience proves nothing, unless perhaps it was a sample of the exception which proves the rule.

I went round and took a look at Charingbank Chambers. It was a quaint, old-fashioned house with irresponsible passages full of ups and downs, with nooks and corners in unsuspected places, and altogether possessed with a charm which even the reek of fresh paint and paper could not dissipate. The remodelling hand of Jarvis had made each bachelor's suite self-contained with its own bathroom, had installed the electric light and speaking-tubes, but the structural plan of the old house had not been altered. Jarvis apologized for the somewhat intricate nature of the architecture. He said it only needed going over two or three times to learn the way about, and explained that it was only a lack of capital which had prevented him from "straightening out" the place. He even showed me some plans which he had had drawn up, plans which officially guaranteed to bring the place "up to date," and he expressed his intention of putting these plans into operation at some future date. He never did. It may be that the kindly ghost of the ancient owner who built and loved the house stayed Jarvis's hand, and little by little the

charm of the old place crept into Jarvis's mind, and he grew to love it too.

I did not tell Jarvis that I had fallen in love with his second-floor suite. Indeed, I feigned indifference with, as I thought, considerable success. I remained stolid even when he told me that from a certain window in this suite I could get a view of the river. He insisted upon my looking at the view then and there. It was quite true. From this window, a little patch of the river was visible. True, the eye had to ignore several obtruding chimney-pots and take a correct course through a narrow cleft between two houses farther on, but there was the river, a silver streak reflecting the late afternoon's sun. As I gazed, a barge with sail spread moved slowly across the view. Of course I did not know at the time that this river view was only possible when the wind was in the east, and that when the wind was west, south, or north, the smoke from divers chimneys obscured the precious view. That was a detail which Jarvis neglected to mention, and even if he had, I doubt if it would have prevented me from taking the suite, for, as I said before, I had fallen in love with it.

I have reason to believe that Jarvis suspected this, for the terms which we eventually agreed upon were Jarvis's. Not that they were exorbitant, but they were more than I ought to have paid at that period. But then, as I have never been able either before or after that period to secure anything which by any stretch of imagination could be considered a bargain, I was not surprised or discomfited. As Browne once said to me, "Some men

and all women are born bargainers, some achieve bargains, and others have bargains thrust upon them." But I, alas, had no place in that category.

It was late November when I took possession of my little suite in Charingbank Chambers. Well do I remember the afternoon when I stepped across my threshold, and Jarvis, rotund of figure, stood puffing amid my luggage, while Mrs. Jarvis arranged the table for tea. Outwardly I was calm, but inwardly I was tingling with satisfaction to think of my emancipation from the shackles of boarding-house life, and my entrance upon the free existence of a gentleman in chambers. A fire glowed cheerily and expensively in the grate of my sitting-room, for it was a chilly, sombre day. As I sank into a cushioned arm-chair and stretched out my legs towards the fender, a sense of being at home and of having sat there before came strongly over me. A goodly number of years have passed since that chilly day in November, but that restful sense of being at home in my chambers has never left me.

They were not palatial chambers. They consisted of but three rooms, a sitting-room, bedroom, and dining-room, but there were quaint built-in closets and odd-shaped corners, and there was an alcove in the dining-room with a window from which the famous view of the river was obtained when the east wind pushed aside the carbon curtain. There was a window-seat in my sitting-room, and a real latticed window! It was two steps up from the floor of my sitting-room to the floor of my dining-room, but then, ample compensation was afforded by the fact that it was two steps down to

the floor of my bedroom on the other side. The decorations and furnishings provided by Jarvis were not altogether harmonious, but as time went on and my earnings increased, I was able to supersede most of Jarvis's "up-to-date" furniture with pieces of more ancient and lovable qualities. Jarvis had no objection to the changes. I think, if anything, he rather encouraged them, for in time I practically refurnished my rooms, while Jarvis suffered no diminution in the amount he received for rent.

As an illustration of my bargaining ability, or rather my lack of bargaining ability, I might mention one instance which occurs to me. One of the original articles of furniture in my sitting-room was a chair which Jarvis called a "grandfather's chair." I cannot remember exactly where Jarvis obtained it. I have a dim recollection that it was an heirloom in Mrs. Jarvis's family. Huge, ugly, misshapen, cavernous, uncomfortable, it was easily the most conspicuous object in the room. It was a nightmare of a chair, conceived in a delirious frenzy by some unbalanced maker of chairs, or possibly evolved as a practical joke by some wooden humorist in the furniture trade. I am convinced that no grandfather who desired rest and ease ever sat of his own free will in that chair for any length of time. Its cushioned seat was knobby, its back protruded where it should have subsided, and sank away into saucer-shaped depressions where it should have been full and rounded. Having once relapsed into its embrace, most of the sitter sank away and disappeared from the room. Only his ankles and feet remained in view. It took

considerable squirming on the part of the sitter to reappear.

Browne inadvertently sat down in this chair one day. Browne is rather heavy, and was glad of my help to pull himself into view again. He wiped his forehead with his handkerchief, looked at the chair curiously, and said, "If I thought I had to sit in a chair like that when I became a grandfather, I would remain a happy young bachelor all my life." Browne named the chair "The Atrocity," and by that name it was known as long as it remained in my sitting-room.

One day, while gazing in at a jumbled collection of furniture through the open door of a second-hand dealer's shop, I saw a chair which gladdened my heart. I pictured it standing in my sitting-room replacing "The Atrocity." If only I could get it at a bargain, I would buy it, I thought. I entered the shop, looked at and priced old china, became interested in Sheraton sideboards, displayed mild curiosity about Buhl cabinets, wandered here and there amid the beautiful but forlorn chaos of furnishings, and finally paused by the delectable chair, the real object of my intentions.

"Nice chair," I said, casually.

"One of the most comfortable and artistic chairs I have in the shop, sir," said the dealer. "Bought it at the Wade-Bullion sale in Mayfair last week. Not many chairs like that to be had, sir."

"How much do you want for it?" I asked, striving to appear indifferent.

"Six guineas, sir."

"Too much," I said promptly. "I might give you three."

"Sorry, sir, but I couldn't think of it," replied the dealer.

Now, I have always been told that the correct thing to do at this point in bargaining is to smile, shrug your shoulders, and walk out of the shop. The dealer would be sure to stop you on the threshold, mention a lower price than he originally quoted, then you would maintain a firm attitude, and eventually you would secure the article at your own figure, or you and the dealer would "split the difference."

I carried out my part of the programme. I smiled and shrugged, walked to the door, and kept on walking, for the dealer made no attempt to stop me. The thing did not work right. There was a fault in the mechanism somewhere. I did not know where, but I was not surprised. It was my usual experience. I went to my chambers and took another look at "The Atrocity." The next day I returned to the dealer and offered him four guineas for the chair. He was very polite, he was very sorry, but he was very firm. The chair had cost him five pounds, seventeen shillings, I think he said, and six guineas was his price. I departed, omitting to smile or shrug, went back to my chambers, and, deep in thought, sat down in "The Atrocity." That decided me. I rescued myself from its depths, summoned Jarvis, and told him "The Atrocity" would have to go, as I had a chair to replace it which I liked better. Jarvis scratched his head, and said he thought he could sell the

chair. He then and there removed it from my sight.

Two days later, on my way to the dealer's shop prepared to pay his price for the coveted chair, and somewhat fearful lest the price quoted might have increased, I came face to face with my friend Jones. Being of an inquiring turn of mind, he soon dug out of me the little story of my futile endeavours to secure a bargain. He fairly cackled over my failure.

"You don't mean to say you are going to pay that dealer what he asks!" he said.

"That is my intention," I replied. "What else can I do?"

"Nothing, absolutely nothing else you can do," replied Jones, emphasizing the word "you." "You don't know the rules of the game. Leave it to me. How much did you say you offered him last?"

"Four guineas."

"I'll buy the chair for you for four guineas. Come along, show me the shop and wait for me outside."

"But," I said, "you don't know the chair I want."

"You can describe it to me, can't you?"

I could and did, and better still, I sauntered with Jones past the open doorway of the shop and pointed out the chair to him as we passed.

"Right!" said Jones. "I'll be out in ten minutes. Wait for me round the corner."

I waited. Jones joined me in nine minutes by the watch.

"Got it!" he said triumphantly. "Four guineas."

Here's the receipt. It will be delivered at your lodgings first thing to-morrow morning." (Jones always made a point of calling my chambers "lodgings.")

I was pleased. I expressed my gratitude to Jones, and paid him the four guineas on the spot. I was intensely curious to know how he managed it.

"Simplest thing in the world," he said. "I just walked into the shop, looked at the chair a moment, and said, 'Give you four guineas for this rotten old chair. Take it or leave it!'"

"Did he take it?" I asked, admiringly.

"Take it! Rather! Looked at me for a moment as if he was taking my measure, then he said, 'Well, if you won't give any more, I'll have to take it. Times are hard.' You see, he knew it was no use trying to fool with me. These dealers know a thing or two. They never try to play the game with one who understands the cards."

I was really grateful to Jones. Clearly he had saved me two guineas. I took him into a tobacconist's shop and bought him a shilling cigar, the only commission he would accept.

The chair had not arrived when I left my chambers the next morning, but I found it upon my return home in the evening. I opened the door of my sitting-room, switched on the light, and the chair was there. It was the most conspicuous object in the room. It was "The Atrocity!" I was considerably amazed and somewhat angry. I summoned Jarvis, and asked him to explain the reappearance of this chair. He said if I could not explain it, he couldn't. He said he had sold the

chair to a second-hand dealer for fifteen shillings, and to-day it was delivered at the Chambers addressed to me. He thought probably I had missed the old chair and had bought it back again.

"I remember doing something like it myself once, sir," said Jarvis. "I 'ad an old mantel clock for years which never kept time, only ticked. I sold it, and if you'll believe me, sir, I missed the sound of it, and a week afterwards I 'unted up the dealer and bought it back again. Curious 'ow these inanimate hobjects gets a 'old on one."

For the first time, I examined the receipt Jones gave me. It read plainly, "One grandfather's chair, four guineas." It was "hobvious," as Jarvis would have said; Jones, bumptious, cocksure Jones, had bought the wrong chair.

I went round to the dealer and explained the situation. He was slightly satirical, but very decent. He took "The Atrocity" away and allowed me to pay the two guineas more for the chair I desired. He said he had met men like Jones before, and had not felt called upon to explain to him that the price of the grandfather's chair was only thirty shillings. He said if it were not for men like Jones, his business would be somewhat uninteresting and decidedly unprofitable. The dealer and I became quite friendly, and I many times thereafter bought articles at his shop. I am not sure that he classed me with Jones, but I imagine he found me profitable if not interesting.

For several years, "The Atrocity" remained unsold in the dealer's shop. Then Jones got married. In a facetious moment I purchased "The

Atrocity " and sent it to Jones as a wedding present. It was accompanied only by a card which had inscribed on it, " From a friend."

The chair's advent among the wedding presents created considerable excitement, both from the fact of the donor being anonymous, and from the fact that no one had ever seen such a chair before. Jones himself had quite forgotten about his purchase for me. He called in several friends who were antique experts. They examined the chair and told Jones that it was impossible to determine what period the chair represented, but they were certain it was not a Chippendale or a Hepplewhite. On that point their opinions were united and unshakable. When Jones and his bride furnished their new home, " The Atrocity " was given a conspicuous place in their drawing-room. Jones confided to me one day that having read the usual stories of hoarded wealth concealed by eccentric people in old arm-chairs, he had explored the interior of the cushions, but without any result except a lacerated finger on a rusty spring. But he said he felt that the chair had been given him for some purpose, and the mystery would some day be solved.

Mrs. Jones hated the chair. She said it quite spoiled the looks of her drawing-room. But Jones refused to have it anywhere else. The mysterious donor, whom Jones pictured as a childless millionaire, would be sure to turn up some day, he said, and what would happen if he should find his gift consigned to the attic or cellar ?

I took pity on Mrs. Jones, and after a few months I solved the mystery for Jones. I don't think he

ever quite forgave me. He said at the time he never would.

I never heard what became of "The Atrocity," but Mrs. Jones's drawing-room knew it no more. Browne once said that he hoped "The Atrocity" would never be destroyed. He thought it was one of the most perfect examples of what a chair should not be, he had ever seen. In its way, it was a classic, he said, and should be preserved in a museum for future generations to wonder at. It would give them some idea of the hardships endured by their ancestors.

Speaking of Browne reminds me that he came to see me at my chambers.

CHAPTER IV

BROWNE was a man of weight. Not only in a business sense, in City circles, but also as a matter of avoirdupois. Browne and I grew up together, I mean to say we started on the upward-growing path together, but Browne soon distanced me. The country estates of our respective parents adjoined each other in Hertfordshire, and Browne and I, being inseparable companions, became known to the village lads by the opprobrious name of "Streaky Bacon." It was the butcher-boy, I think, who evolved this nickname from the interior of his greasy mentality, being inspired thereunto by the inseparable conjunction of fat and lean as expressed by Browne and myself. Browne fought the butcher-boy over the matter, but I am sorry to say Browne prevailed not. Later, I fought the butcher-boy over the same matter, but I am still more sorry to say that the result was not to my satisfaction. I think, if anything, I looked worse than Browne did after his encounter. So the name of "Streaky Bacon" remained. It even followed us to school, and we had not quite fought it down when we entered Eton.

Curious how a person who has accumulated a trifle more adipose tissue than he really needs always resents being called "fat." You may call

him "heavy," you may mention in an admiring way that he has been "putting on weight," some men do not resent even being called "stout," but to term him "fat" is to risk losing his friendship. Browne was very sensitive about his weight: Personally I do not think he could reasonably be called "fat." I should say he was what is termed "well set up." I, erring in the opposite direction, had always been a trifle envious of Browne's proclivity for taking on weight. But Browne hated it.

He tried many expedients to reduce his weight, including various athletic games such as croquet, golf, football (as a spectator), cricket (as a score-keeper), motoring, boating (at the rudder), and for a short time in later years he took up boxing. He was particularly keen on boxing, and after several lessons, I think he rather fancied himself as an exponent of the art of self-defence. He kept a punching-bag in his bedroom, and had a lively bout with it every morning before dressing. Later on, he persuaded Higgins, his valet, to put on the gloves with him. I used to watch them at it some days between tea-time and dinner. Higgins, who was about the age of Browne, was never keen on the sport. He put on the gloves and stood up to Browne because he was ordered in a way to do it, but one could see that he derived no pleasure from it. He acted entirely on the defensive, so much so that Browne used to become irritated.

"Hit back at me!" Browne would cry. "You're not a punching-bag, are you?"

"No, sir," Higgins would reply.

"Well then, have a go at me!"

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"Yes, sir."

Then Higgins would make a few feeble attacks, easily warded off by Browne, after which Higgins would relapse into his defensive attitude. Once or twice I thought I detected a gleam in Higgins's eyes as Browne beat through his defence and landed pretty heavily on his jaw. Once, when a left-hander from Browne drew blood from Higgins's nose, I am almost certain Higgins swore. It wasn't a loud swear, and I don't think Browne heard it, but judging from what happened later on, I feel sure my ears did not deceive me.

I was privileged to be present the last time Browne put on the gloves with Higgins. They had cleared the centre of the drawing-room, and were hard at it when I arrived. That is, Browne was hard at it, Higgins as usual passively defending himself. Browne grew more and more irritated at Higgins's passive resistance.

"For heaven's sake, Higgins," he cried, "hit out! Be a man, and not a wooden image!"

With that, Browne went for Higgins without mercy. Around the room they circled, Higgins retreating, Browne attacking, until finally, with a resounding smack, he caught Higgins below the left eye, and Higgins went down with a crash. I was near Higgins when he arose. He said only one word. It was "Damn!" Then he reached for Browne. He made just two moves, but they were beautifully and pugilistically scientific. He feinted with his left at Browne's stomach, Browne lowered his guard, and instantly Higgins's right flew out straight from the shoulder. It caught Browne on

the point of the jaw. They were near the hall doorway, and Browne disappeared. There was a terrific crash, I hurried into the hall and found Browne asleep on the ruins of Ajax' basket. Ajax, fortunately, was not in his basket at the moment.

With the assistance of cold water liberally applied, Higgins and I finally woke Browne up, took off his gloves, and guided him to the Chesterfield in the drawing-room. Higgins, once more the respectful and faithful valet, was overwhelmed with contrition. After he had made Browne comfortable, he followed me to the door.

"I can't think 'ow I came to do it, sir," he said. "I didn't mind him punching me around. It must 'ave been the nagging he give me. You see, sir, I was once the amatoor light-weight champion of Croydon." He smiled reminiscently. "I thought I might 'ave forgotten that little trick, but I 'adn't. Not so bad, sir, was it, for one out of practice?" He almost chuckled.

Decidedly there was a human streak in Higgins after all. But a moment later it was Higgins the valet, solemn and wooden-faced, who helped me on with my coat, produced my hat and stick, and rang for the lift.

Browne told me afterwards that he did not mind the knock-out, for it proved to him that the germ of real manhood was only dormant in Higgins after all. He had had an idea that Higgins must have been born without that germ. Browne had a much higher opinion of Higgins after that, but he never put on the gloves with him again, and gradually his keenness for boxing dulled and finally disappeared.

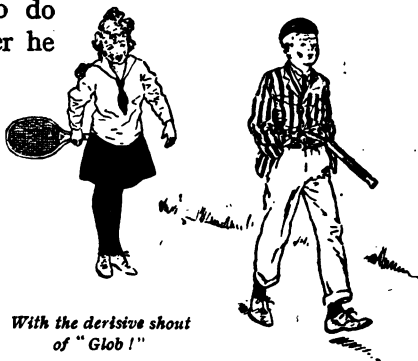
Browne's sensitiveness about his weight developed at an early age, and as I have mentioned, was responsible for his disastrous fight with the butcher-boy. It was also responsible for the coolness, not to say bitterness, which sprang up between him and my sister Helen. Helen, who was five years younger than Browne, seemed to have been born with a faculty for discerning the sensitive spots in people's characters, and she seemed to take peculiar delight in sprinkling those spots with the red pepper of her ridicule. Even as a child she found that sensitive spot in Browne's character, and took no steps to conceal her amusement at his fleshy development. She hailed with delight the butcher-boy's inspiration of "Streaky Bacon," although I, her brother, was included in the atrocious nickname. It was, I think, at the age of nine that she improved upon the butcher-boy's inspiration as applied to Browne. One day, after a quarrel with Browne over, I think, the disputed ownership of a tennis-ball, she said that fat boys always reminded her of the globe in the schoolroom. She said Browne's physical appearance was nothing less than globular. She threw the ball at Browne, made a hasty retreat across the tennis lawn, and as she disappeared in the shrubbery, she rechristened Browne with the derisive shout of "Glob!"

Thereafter, to her he was "Glob" Browne. Nothing I could do in a brotherly way, such as pulling her hair or shaking her, had any effect. She even took revenge by bestowing a nickname on me. She said, compared with "Glob" I was a mere shadow. It took her but a moment to curtail

the term "shadow" to "Shad," and "Shad" I was to her from that time forward even for evermore.

I think if Browne had treated Helen's ridicule as a joke and had laughed it off, it would not have affected him the way it did. But he did not seem able to do

this, and thereafter he cordially hated Helen. He took no pains to conceal his aversion to her, and while our boyish friendship continued as before, the presence of Helen almost always



resulted in our games ending abruptly in disputes and recriminations. I think Helen was somewhat sorry at first that she had bestowed the name of "Glob" on Browne, but as time went on and the coolness between them increased, Helen became defiant and more than ever resolved not to give way.

When Browne and I returned from Eton, our respective physical appearances, comparatively speaking, had not altered greatly, and to Helen we were still "Glob" and "Shad." She was still a slim, undeveloped girl crowned with a riotous mop of red-gold hair, and while she did not openly inflict the name of "Glob" on Browne, it needed no acute discernment to see that the name lurked very close to the tip of her tongue and certainly

twinkled in her eyes as she took stock of his increased bulk and weight. Browne was polite but cold, and I could see that he was uncomfortable in Helen's presence. In the interval we spent at our homes between the time we left Eton and when we entered Cambridge, Browne avoided Helen as much as possible, but it would have taken much more than Browne's avoidance to have dampened the joy of Helen's care-free life at that period.

Browne and I went away to Cambridge, and it was a number of years before Browne and Helen met again. I had barely completed my first term at Cambridge when my father passed away, and as I have explained elsewhere, Helen went to live with her aunt in Chelsea, and I went to seek employment. When we three met again, it was in my sitting-room in Charingbank Chambers. Browne having finished his course at Cambridge, had, in succession to his father, become a man of business in the City, and I, after two years of journalistic work, mostly with the defunct newspaper I have mentioned, had fallen a victim to an insidious but pleasant complaint, known to me only, I imagine, as "pencilitis." I contracted it in my newspaper work. To me, the contact of a soft-point pencil with the smooth but unglazed surface of a paper pad is soothing and inspiring. With a pen, fountain or otherwise, my thoughts linger and halt, while the clatter of the typewriter spells to me confusion. To be sure, the typewriter is a most excellent and necessary adjunct to the pencil, but to me it must come after the pencil, after my thoughts, sometimes riotous and struggling for expression, have rushed from my

pencil's point and spread themselves in black-lead streams across the soft, white pages.

So it came to pass that, being afflicted by "pencilitis," my work for the Press did not cease with the demise of the newspaper with which I began, but snug in the quiet of my chambers, my pencilled thoughts flowed on and out. Many, many times they came back to me, but sometimes they did not return. In their stead came a typewritten line and an enclosure which reconciled me to their permanent absence. The enclosures helped to keep the wolf from the door, although I must admit that Jarvis was a very mild and fangless wolf. As time went on, the products of my pencil returned less frequently, and my time at my desk lengthened more and more. It was not irksome ; no work ever is irksome which one loves.

It was a pleasant place to me, my desk by the latticed window. To be sure, the view from the window was not alluring. It was principally bricks and chimney-pots, relieved, or rather accompanied, by a little old tree which had root in a tiny piece of ground between two buildings. The ground was scarcely ten feet in width. I do not know why it was never built upon. It seemed to be a no-man's ground, neglected and forlorn. Viewing it, one could conjure up thoughts of long-continued and undecided lawsuits over boundary-lines, resulting only in masses of dusty documents reposing in musty pigeon-holes, tied up with tape from which the red colour had faded even as the memory of the ground and the lawsuits had faded from the ken of all concerned.

So the little old tree had undisputed possession, and when I first saw it on a chill November day, I remember thinking how very dingy and lonely it looked. A veritable derelict of a tree, cast up by Nature on a most inhospitable brick-and-mortar shore. It was not a dead tree, but it seemed almost impossible that it should ever again be green with foliage. Then, one morning in early spring, as I glanced from my window, lo, a miracle had happened ! The branches of the old tree had bedecked themselves with bulbous points of pink, and as the day advanced and the sun shone warm, the bulbous points swelled and opened into blossoms. It was an almond-tree ! It pleased my fancy then to think that the old tree at the first touch of the warm spring sunshine had sent down a message to the colour-gnomes who dwelt beneath her roots and guarded her wardrobe ; and obedient to her call, they had sent up the dotted pink dress with which she always greeted the coming of spring. Later, she would call for her summer dress of green, and send the pink one down to be stored away for another year. Always thereafter, when I looked at the tree, I was reminded of dear, old, silver-haired ladies of another generation who loved bright-coloured dresses and kept them in mahogany wardrobes smelling of lavender, and who on festive occasions brought forth the gay dresses from their retirement to revive youthful memories.

Helen used to love to visit me in my chambers. She said she came to cheer me up ; although I never knew just why she thought I needed cheering up. She used to bring me little pieces of embroidery to

bedeck my chairs and tables, and always insisted that a latticed window-sill without the presence of flowers or potted plants was a condition not to be tolerated even for a day. She took good care not to come to my chambers when she knew Browne was to be there, for as she grew older her aversion to him seemed to grow stronger, and she was impatient if I even happened to mention his name.

"Are you sure you are not lonely here, Shad?" she asked one day, as she watched me scribbling.

"Not very often," I answered, laying aside my pencil and leaning back in my chair.

"That means you are sometimes," she persisted.

"Who isn't?" I replied.

"Are you certain, quite certain you don't feel the need of anything?"

"Is there any one who doesn't feel the need of something he hasn't got?" I answered.

"Ah, I thought so," said Helen.

"Thought what?" I asked.

"You do need something, and I am going to get it for you."

"What is it?" I asked.

"It's a secret, wait and see!" she said. Then she giggled and danced out of the room, her red-gold pigtail flapping joyously. The next instant her head reappeared in the doorway.

"You've got to keep it when it comes!" she cried, then slammed the door.

Two days later "it" came. I was seated at my desk when the door of my sitting-room opened seemingly of its own volition, for as I glanced up

from my work, no person appeared in the doorway. At first I thought the door had been but partially closed and a draught had blown it open. Then I became aware that something was moving slowly across the floor in my direction. I riveted my gaze upon it, then, discarding my pencil, I sank

upon my knees and awaited its coming. It was a smooth-coat fox-terrier puppy straight from some fairy heaven exclusively reserved for baby dogs. On he came across the floor with uncertain, wobbly steps, emitting at intervals that plaintive cry which puppies alone



know how to make. On he came into my outstretched hands, and as I lifted him up against my breast he crept into my heart and will never leave it. That was the advent of "Jimmy" into my life. As I caressed the cuddling mite, Helen appeared in the doorway bubbling with mirth.

"Isn't he a dear?" she exclaimed.

"I thought he was a dog," I said.

"Don't be silly!" said Helen. "And don't squeeze your darling so tightly!"

"My darling," I exclaimed.

"Certainly!" answered Helen. "He belongs to you. He's the secret!"

"But, Helen," I said helplessly, "I can't keep him. I know nothing about babies."

"He's not a baby," said Helen. "He's an angel!"

"But I am equally uninformed about angels," I said.

"It's perfectly simple," said Helen. "First you give him a name, then you feed him, and then—and then—well, then he grows up and loves you, and you will never be lonely any more for ever. It's quite simple!"

"But Jarvis," I argued, "Jarvis won't like it, I'm afraid."

"Jarvis will like it! Leave Jarvis to me," said Helen.

How Helen managed Jarvis I never knew, but the "angel" remained with me, and I named him and fed him, and he grew up and loved me, and I was never lonely any more, even as Helen had said.

Helen at first objected to the name of "Jimmy" which I bestowed on the "angel." The Christian name of Browne is James, and Helen and I had always known him as Jimmy, except when Helen rechristened him "Glob." She said she did not wish to be reminded of a certain disagreeable and corpulent person every time she looked at the "angel." I had to remind her that the name "Jimmy" was not the exclusive property of Browne. I said the name "Jimmy" became associated in my mind with the dear little canine "angel" as he wobbled across the floor, even before he reached my outstretched hands. I said I believed, without being able to explain why, that the name

"Jimmy" had been given him before he left that mysterious celestial abode of puppies, and that his plaintive cry upon arrival here was but his announcement of the fact that "Jimmy" had come. Helen quite saw the point of my argument, and being thus assured that I had not deliberately named him after Browne, she too grew to like the name as applied to the "angel," and said it fitted him perfectly. So "Jimmy" it was, and "Jimmy" it has remained.

The feeding of "Jimmy" was another problem altogether. As it happened, neither Helen nor I had ever owned a dog before, and the matter of his food-supply unfolded huge and unsuspected difficulties. Not that we lacked advice on the subject, on the contrary. It was astonishing what interest my friends and even acquaintances took in the food-supply of "Jimmy." Jarvis, who said he once owned a bull-pup, distinctly advised raw meat, while Mrs. Jarvis resolutely favoured milk and dog-biscuits. Browne at first entertained a suspicion that "Jimmy" had been named after him because of a similarity in their physical development, and there is no denying that "Jimmy" did wax round and fat in his youthful growth. But I explained to Browne as I did to Helen the groundlessness of his suspicion, and then Browne took an interest in "Jimmy's" diet also. He said Ajax was fed on vegetables for six days in the week, and on Sundays received a ration of cooked meat, *cooked*, not raw. He said Ajax was as finely developed a dog as one could wish to see, and his lung-power was as finely developed as one could wish to hear.

"By all means," he said, "feed 'Jimmy' with vegetables and a very little cooked meat, not raw. Jarvis is an ass!"

So it went on, and for about six months "Jimmy's" diet was a fearful and wonderful conglomeration. Having no standard knowledge of my own on the subject, I accepted and followed this advice and that advice, trusting that "Jimmy's" constitution would survive the experiments.

For instance, one day, Helen came in very excited to inform me that a lady friend of her's, who owned I forget how many dogs, had told her to see that "Jimmy" was fed exclusively on cooked cabbage with a very occasional dog-biscuit. She said it was the only diet that would keep off distemper, bad temper, mange, ringworm, measles, gout, and other cheerful ailments. In short, if we wanted to keep "Jimmy" with us on this plane of existence, cabbage and cabbage alone (plus one or two dog-biscuits) could do it. Helen was so convinced by this advice that I perforce had to be convinced also. Jarvis was ordered to begin the cabbage regime that very day. Later in the day, while chatting with my friend Jones at the Club, I happened to mention vegetarianism as applied to dogs. Jones started and stared at me.

"Do you mean to say you are feeding 'Jimmy' on vegetables?" he asked.

I replied feebly that I was at present.

"What sort of vegetables?" he demanded.

"Cabbage," I replied.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Jones, "cabbage!"

"Isn't it all right?" I asked anxiously.

"All right?" exclaimed Jones. "All wrong!" He arose and moved towards the billiard-room. I followed, but he waved me away.

"I told you a month ago that nuts, apples, and goat's milk were the only proper food for puppies. But you never take my advice. Cabbage! Good heavens! Well, he's your dog, not mine! Poor 'Jimmy'!"

I waited to hear no more. I hurried from the Club to my chambers to countermand the cabbage order. I was too late. "Jimmy" had absorbed his cabbage ration a half-hour before. He did not seem uncomfortable. That was the curious part about his many changes of diet; he went cheerfully from one to the other without visible effect, except that he daily grew more sturdy and mischievous. From a meatarian, he changed to a vegetarian, then in turn to a nutarian, fruitarian, dog-biscuitarian, and finally to an anythingarian, and an anythingarian he has remained. It was a full six months or more before Helen and I awakened to the fact that "Jimmy" was a confirmed anythingarian, and then a great anxiety was lifted from our minds.

So, "Jimmy" fed and played and barked and grew up. He early established his sleeping quarters on the foot end of my bed, and no king in his chamber was ever more faithfully guarded than I. As I worked at my desk, he curled himself in a soft-cushioned chair near-by from which he could watch my face. This chair was soon known as "Jimmy's" chair and was reserved for him. As I occasionally glanced at him and smiled, his tail

would beat quickly upon the cushion in reply. His white ear always stood sharply erect, while his black ear drooped gracefully. I am sure "Jimmy" had not been with me very long before he sent (by some mysterious wireless agency), a message back to that celestial paradise of puppies from whence he came, a message to say that he was well pleased with his new abode and intended to stay with me, his beloved and loving companion, just as long as he possibly could.

CHAPTER V

BROWNE, being, as I have said, of considerable weight in business circles, necessarily gave a good portion of each day to his work in the City. I have reason to believe that when he succeeded to his father's business, his early experiences among his business associates were not such as to make him overjoyful. He lacked practical business experience, he was youthful in appearance, he was diffident and deferred to his colleagues' more mature knowledge. In consequence, they ignored him as much as possible, and when any serious matter of business was on, they diplomatically advised him to be seen and not heard, or, better still, to "run away and play!" For a while, Browne was content to do this, but not for long. He was too much the son of his father for that. He began to edge his way in, to mildly assert his rightful position, and to venture an opinion now and then on subjects under consideration. His associates did not actively oppose him, they simply ignored his opinions and suggestions. They were suave, they were polite, they listened, and then they adopted their own plan. This treatment used to make Browne boil mentally, and sometimes he came to me to unburden his mind. I remember on one occasion he dropped into my chambers about tea-time.

I could always tell when Browne was about to "drop in," from the fact that as his weight pressed upon the second step from the top of the stairway opposite my door, that step invariably became vocal with a peculiar creaking whistle, the sound of which penetrated my closed door, and was audible in any part of my chambers. The curious part about it was that Browne alone seemed able to provoke the step to its vocal effort. I never knew the step to whistle save when Browne trod upon it. It was probably due to his weight or the pressure he exerted at some certain spot. I could never make it respond to my tread, and it was silent even under the weight of Jarvis, and Jarvis was no light weight. But then, Jarvis probably knew that vocal spot and avoided it.

However, as I was saying, Browne dropped in at tea-time one day, and I could see at once that he was mentally perturbed. It was not, however, until he had disposed of three of his favourite tea-cakes and two cups of tea that he unburdened his mind.

"Behold," he said, dramatically, "the champion ass whose name is Browne!"

"Why, what's the matter?" I asked.

"Nothing, nothing! I simply said behold the champion asinine personality answering to the name of Browne!"

"Is it as bad as all that?" I asked.

"Worse!" replied Browne. "Listen while I Bray! As you know, my father's Will compels me to associate in a business way with a certain group of men. These men imagine that all business knowledge is theirs by right of Divine

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decree, and if they fail to carry through a business proposition, then that proposition is dead and settled for ever, for if they couldn't do it, neither heaven, earth, nor the other place contains any one who could ! ”

“ Have another cup of tea,” I said, soothingly.

“ Wait,” said Browne. “ I want to tell you about the ass whose name is Browne. We had a Board meeting this afternoon. For three weeks, we have been trying to get old Witherspun of the Unreality Trust Company to sign an agreement which would bring his interests into line with ours, and which would be of considerable financial benefit to him as well as to us. No use to go into details, I don't think you would understand.”

“ I believe you,” I murmured.

“ Well, to condense the tale, these associates of mine have each in turn tried to see old Witherspun and get him to sign the agreement. Each in turn has failed. Witherspun simply refused to see them, and sent out word that he wouldn't have anything to do with the matter. Each made his little report of failure at the Board meeting, and the consensus of opinion was that the matter had better be dropped permanently. I mildly inquired why I had not been asked to see Witherspun. Of course, I hadn't the slightest desire to take on the job, but their manner of ignoring me was exasperating. They looked at me in polite surprise, and made various excuses, but gave me pretty clearly to understand that as they had not succeeded, my chance of success was about 100 per cent below nil. That nettled me, and I told them plainly that the

matter would not be dropped until I too had reported failure. Two or three of them smiled in a nasty, sarcastic way, and I intercepted a deliberate wink which the chairman bestowed on the rest of the Board. I stood up, told them a few straight, homely truths, and retired. It was only after I got away that I began to realize what I had let myself in for. As I said before, behold in me the champion long-eared quadruped ! ”

“ But suppose you succeed in getting Witherspun to sign the agreement,” I said.

“ Succeed ! ” cried Browne. “ There isn’t one chance in three hundred million ! My father and old Witherspun were deadly enemies. My father used to say that even abject poverty could not deprive him of one luxury, the joy of hating old Witherspun. To Witherspun, the name of Browne was anathema ! They say he wouldn’t let his clerks wear brown boots. Reminded him of my father. He discovered one day that the young lady who took his dictation had brown eyes. Week’s notice ! Oh, yes, he would be likely to invite me into his private office for a friendly chat, just as soon as he learned my name was Browne ! Now, if my name was Green or White or Black, or any other colour, I might have a chance, but Browne, the son of Nathaniel Browne, is foredoomed to failure. Not that I care particularly about the agreement, but I do care about the next meeting of our Board. Cheerful prospect, isn’t it ! ”

A sudden idea occurred to me. The name of Green suggested it.

“ When are you going to see Witherspun ? ” I asked.

"Next week. The old blighter is out of town."

"Good," I said. "What you need is a little expert advice."

"What I need," said Browne, "is a good solid kick for being such a rotten fool!"

"Do you happen to know Green, the American?" I asked.

"I've met two or three green Americans; which one do you mean?" replied Browne.

I ignored Browne's pleasantry. I knew Green was in London on one of his periodical business visits, and I felt that he was the man to help Browne in his dilemma. Anyway, I felt that two such good fellows as Browne and Green ought to know each other. So Browne promised to come in at tea-time the next day, and I guaranteed the presence of Green.

As Green had been in London three weeks or more, and was far advanced in his congenial complaint of "Londonitis," I did not seek him in the busy City. I bent my steps westwards, and soon found him in Hyde Park on that beautiful stretch of green which borders the driving row between the Achilles statue and the fountain in the sunken garden. He had selected a chair under one of the noble trees, and with his straw hat resting in his lap, the inevitable cigar between his lips, was watching the carriages, the cars, and the fashionably dressed throng in dreamy content. He readily agreed to come to tea at my chambers the next day and meet Browne.

"I guess I'm falling for this idea of afternoon tea like the rest of you people," he said. "Absolutely impossible to live in London and keep tea out of

your system. Sure, I'll come. By the time I get back to New York, I expect I'll be so saturated with the tea habit that my internal organism will start a howl for its dose of tannin every day about four o'clock. Business will have to wait on the cup that cheers. Fancy a cup cheering loud enough to stop business on Broadway for an hour! Some cup, eh?"

Our tea the following day was a success. Browne and Green seemed to take to each other. Green emulated Browne in his fondness for Mrs. Jarvis's tea-cakes, and I think this fact established him in Browne's good graces at once. At the end of the tea ceremony, Green's cigar resumed its fragrant work, and he settled down in his chair to listen to Browne, who, urged by me, laid his business problem before the New-Yorker. Green's eyes twinkled as Browne described Witherspun, but he said nothing until Browne had finished.

"The joy of knowing your old friend Witherspun has been withheld from me," said Green, chuckling, "but I once knew his American prototype, and his name was Barker. Like as two peas! It was about twenty years ago that I first came up against old Barker. He was some growler, believe me! I was employed at that time by a big house which made fancy goods for the trade. Barker had a string of stores that sold our goods; that is, he didn't exactly sell *our* goods, for none of our drummers could face his music long enough to get an order."

Browne looked a bit puzzled.

"Translated into English, 'drummers' means 'travelling salesmen,'" I explained to Browne.

"That's right," said Green, smiling. "You have known me long enough to absorb a little American lingo; if Mr. Browne doesn't understand, you interpret, see?"

I nodded, and Green resumed.

"Yes, sir, old Barker had a grouch against our firm for some reason, and the only order our boys could get from him was an order to get out of his office quick! His favourite order was, 'I'll give you just one minute to get out of that door!' and he generally emphasized his order by grabbing a heavy, ebony ruler which lay on his desk. Well, you bet the boys made an instantaneous disappearance, just like a film scene at the 'movies.' One moment the picture showed the salesman trying to talk to Barker, and the next moment the picture showed old Barker alone and registering sardonic satisfaction. He finally became known among the boys as 'One-minute Barker.' My territory lay outside New York, and I had never been to see Barker. I was new to the firm, but after hearing so much about Barker and the boys' failures, I got my think-factory to work, and one day I told our sales manager that I would like to tackle friend Barker. The sales manager grinned, said he thought my name fitted me pretty well, but he had no objection if I hadn't. When the other salesmen found that I was going to have a try at Barker, they gathered round me, asked if I preferred wreaths or crosses, and each gave me the gloomy grip."

("Mournful handshake," I interpreted in a murmur to Browne.)

"Well, I planned my little campaign, and two



"One-minute Barker"

days later, with a price-list and a bunch of samples, I hiked forth to the attack. They told me old Barker was alone in his private office, and without waiting to be announced, I just opened the door, stepped inside, and said, 'Good morning!' Barker wheeled in his chair and glared at me. Believe me, if I hadn't been prepared, I would have faded away without warbling another note! Being prepared, however, I tripped merrily across the room and laid my firm's card on his desk. He shot one glance at it, grabbed the ebony ruler and growled out the words I was waiting to hear.

" 'I'll give you just one minute to get out of that door!'

"Quick as lightning, I had my watch out and said, 'Thank you, Mr. Barker; it will take me only five seconds to clear that doorway, and that leaves me fifty-five seconds to talk business!' I yanked open my sample-case, spread the samples with the price-list on his desk, and began my little speech. Oh, I was letter-perfect, you bet! I had rehearsed it for two days, and the words shot out with a force and rapidity that would have made a Maxim gun jam with envy! At the end of ten seconds, old Barker half rose in his chair, and I could see the ambulance and the hospital waiting for me, but I kept right on. I said, 'Play the game, Mr. Barker, play the game! I've got forty-five seconds more!' At the end of thirty seconds, Barker tried to say something, but his feelings choked his voice. He raised that ruler threateningly, and I could smell iodoform and hear nurse saying, 'Drink some of this,' but I didn't falter. As the hand of my watch

reached the five-second limit, I grabbed my sample-case and said, 'Good morning, Mr. Barker; thank you for your patience and courtesy. I'll be around to-morrow for your order.' I had calculated that it would take me five seconds to make a graceful exit, but at the last moment I decided to cut out the grace and just make the exit, and it only took me two seconds! The ebony potentate went through the doorway with me, but as luck would have it there was room for both of us, and we didn't jostle.

"Well, gentlemen, you've read of a big-game hunter who wounds a tiger which makes off into the jungle grass, and the hunter has to crawl after it to make sure whether he has killed it or not. It takes nerve, for he's mighty uncertain about his reception. That was Billy Green's attitude of mind the next morning when he entered Barker's establishment. The clerks in the outer office grinned when they saw me. They had noticed me exiting the day before. I sent in my card this time. In a few moments the clerk returned, looked at me sympathetically, and said I was to go in. I went in prepared to dodge if necessary, but before I could even say 'Good morning,' old Barker said, 'I'll give you just one minute to take your samples and get out of this office, and provided you don't open your mouth, you can take this order with you.' With that, he handed me a sheet of paper. When I saw the size of that order, I had to grab my lower jaw to keep my mouth shut! I and my samples were out of that office in less than one minute, and I made a bee-line for headquarters.

"The sales manager thought I was pulling a joke on him when I showed him the order. He had to confirm it by telephone before he would believe me. Later in the day, the head of the firm called me into his private office. He had me tell him in detail about my interview with Barker. When I had finished, he said in a dreamy sort of way, 'Fools rush in where angels fear to tread.' Then suddenly, he thumped his desk with his fist and said, 'By Jinks! we've got too many angels in this business; what we need are a few more damn-fools!'"

Green grinned his appreciation of the laughter with which Browne and I received his story, and after lighting another cigar, he continued:

"I sold plenty of our goods to Barker after that, and the firm raised my salary, but I didn't stay with them. Old Barker sent for me one day and offered me the position of his private secretary. He said it was unfortunately necessary to have some one to help him, and I seemed to be the one who irritated him the least. That's how I got my real start in business. I gradually grew to understand old Barker, and when I did, I found that beneath his grim, granite exterior, he was just as human as any of us. He even knew how to love, for he had a daughter who inspired a great tenderness in him. She was worthy of his love too. I know, for I loved and married her. For five years we were very happy together. Then she went away—to the 'undiscovered country.' Old Barker missed her and fretted. One day he said to me, 'Billy, I guess I'm pretty tired and need a rest. I think I'll try a change of scene. Maybe I'll come across Marjorie.

You know, she said she would be waiting for me—and you.' So, he went away too."

Green was silent for a few moments, a far-away look in his eyes, his cigar unheeded between his fingers. It was "Jimmy" who roused him from his reverie. Placing his front paws on Green's knee, he touched his hand with his cold, moist nose. Green started, smiled, relit his cigar, and gently patted "Jimmy's" head.

"I reckon I got off the main line!" he said. "What I intended to suggest to you, Mr. Browne, was, that in the business world there are a good many men like Barker. In a business sense, they enjoy a fight; but as a rule, they respect and prefer an antagonist who makes a frontal attack. They have no use for a man who sneaks behind them or tries to turn their flank, and they despise the man who shows the white flag or runs at the first sign of danger. When you tackle a man like Barker, my advice is, be sure your ammunition is all right, then fire away. Of course, there's always the chance, if you don't know your man, that he may not be like Barker at all. Then your frontal attack may fail. In that case you, or what's left of you, had better fall back on your reserves, and try other tactics."

Browne listened to Green with great interest until the latter had finished.

"Thanks awfully, Mr. Green," said Browne. "What you have said has given me an idea which is simply top-hole!"

"Huh?" said Green, inquiringly.

I interpreted. "An idea which is an absolute sky-scraper!"

Green understood at once. I felt quite pleased with my success as an Anglo-American interpreter.

One afternoon, about a week after my tea-party, the creaking signal of the faithful step announced the coming of Browne. Being deeply engrossed with my work at my desk, I was subconsciously aware of his entrance, but it was not until he spoke that I detached my thought from the realm of the imaginative and brought it into surroundings more material and tangible.

"I've done it, Shad!" he cried. (Browne generally addressed me by the youthful nickname invented by Helen.) I did not know what Browne meant, but I had a vague idea that I ought to know.

"Sit down, Jimmy," I said. "I always knew you would do it. Er—what is it you have done?"

"Agreement! Witherspun!" exclaimed Browne.

Like a flash it all came back to me.

"No!" I cried, admiringly.

"Yes, thanks to that sky-scooper idea which Green gave me!"

"Sky-scraper," I corrected.

"Quite so," said Browne. "I used a frontal attack. As I told you the other day, I really didn't care whether he signed the agreement or not. What I wanted was to get into his office and talk to him face to face, something those colleagues of mine had not been able to do. This afternoon, having ascertained that he was at his office, I called and sent in my card. Under my name on the card I had written, 'son of the late Nathaniel J. Browne.' That was the first shell of my attack, and I reckoned that its arrival would arouse his curiosity. He

would want to know what the son of his old enemy wished to see him about. I was not mistaken. In a few minutes, a message came back inviting me to enter. Old Witherspun was standing near his desk with my card in his hand. For a moment we faced each other, neither speaking. He is an old man, slightly built, and his eyes seemed to be the most vital part of him. Hard, shrewd, penetrating in its intensity, his gaze seemed to bore into my very being.



"I did not wait for him to speak. I began the attack, and remembering Green's experience, I had my little speech ready, and I too was letter-perfect. I said, 'Mr. Witherspun, a certain group of business men have for some time been endeavouring to get you to sign an agreement which they think would be of mutual benefit to you and them. You have refused to sign the agreement or even to see them. I do not know whether you are aware that I am associated with these men, because I have succeeded my father in his business. I have called on you to-day, not with the slightest hope that you will sign this agreement, but simply because I desire to report to the other members of my Board who have seen fit to ignore me in the matter, that I have at least been able to see you personally, something they have not been able to do. Here, Mr. Witherspun, is the agreement, and as the son of the late Nathaniel

Old Witherspun was standing near his desk with my card in his hand

Browne, I want to tell you that I don't care a damn whether you sign it or not !' I stepped forward, laid the agreement on his desk, and turned to go.

" 'Wait, a moment,' said Witherspun. I turned again and looked at him. I thought I could detect a little softening in the hardness of his gaze, and for an instant there was a decided twinkle in his eyes, almost akin to amusement. 'Sit down,' he said, indicating a chair. I did as I was bid, and he sat down at his desk. He glanced over the agreement and finally said, 'So you, as the son of the late Nathaniel Browne, don't care a 'something' whether I sign this agreement or not, eh ?' 'You heard what I said, Mr. Witherspun,' I replied, 'there is no need for me to repeat it. I know you hated my father, and I imagine my father was not overloving towards you ; therefore you can understand that his son asks no favours of you.'

"Old Witherspun rocked back and forth in his desk-chair and tapped absently with his fingers on his desk. He seemed to be looking far beyond me as he asked, 'Supposing now, we could leave Nathaniel out of this interview, and supposing you could present this agreement to me as from (he glanced at my card), J. Wayinton Browne, and not as from the son of any particular Browne, would you still be of the opinion that you didn't care an expletive whether I signed it or not ?'

"Well, Shad, he had me there. I couldn't answer for a moment. I had to analyse my own thoughts, but when that analysis was made I let him have it straight from the front again. I said, 'Mr. Witherspun, I do care. Personally, I want you to sign that

agreement, but I want you to understand also that it is not merely because of the financial benefits which may come from it. My main, overwhelming reason is that I want to rub it in good and hard on those swollen-head associates of mine !'

" Well, Shad, if you will believe me, old Wither-spun laughed, actually leaned back in his chair and shook until his false teeth rattled ! Then he said, ' No need to tell me whose son you are ! ' He took a pen and wrote something on the agreement and handed it to me. He had signed it, and underneath his signature he had written, ' I have signed this agreement solely because Jimmy Browne asked me to do so, and asked me in the right way. ' I started to thank him, but he interrupted, saying, ' I know that agreement is a good thing, but I couldn't stand the manner in which those associates of yours tried to present it to me. They knew it was a good thing, but they hadn't the courage of their convictions. Figuratively speaking, they sneaked around the rear of my den, and the moment I growled, they flew ! ' He chuckled, and then he laid his hand on my arm and said, ' Jimmy, your father and I were never real enemies. We both loved a business scrap, but the results were only scratches, they never left deep-seated scars. I think I have realized this more since he has passed away, and doubtless he knows it too. '

" So, Shad, the frontal attack was a glaring success, and when I meet my Board——"

Browne arose from his chair and executed a mad dance. It made the floor vibrate and caused " Jimmy " to bark excitedly. It was not a graceful

dance. It could hardly be said that he "tripped the light, fantastic toe." He tripped all right, over an ottoman, and smashed my waste-paper basket, but the toe was not the light, fantastic one. The "heavy, elephantine trot" best expresses the character of Browne's war-dance, but it seemed to relieve his feelings. He arose from the ruins of my basket, sobered and sane once more.

"You and Green are to dine with me at the Savoy this evening," he said, as he picked stray bits of paper off his clothes.

"I did not know it," I said.

"You know it now," said Browne, "and you may as well sign the agreement to do so for yourself and Green at once!"

"Another frontal attack!" I murmured.

"Right oh! and I don't care a 'high-explosive' if you do refuse. You are coming anyway, and you are bringing Green with you!"

"Jimmy," I said, "I will do so on one condition."

"Name it," said Browne.

"When you marry the daughter of Witherspun, that one and only daughter whom he loves and cherishes, I want to be your best man."

"Sorry. Witherspun hasn't got a daughter; he is an old bachelor," said Browne.

"Heavens!" I cried, "what a spoiled romance! What a blow to Witherspun!"

CHAPTER VI

BROWNE had rather peculiar ideas about the feminine sex. In his boyhood, he early evinced a decided dislike for girls. He had none of those youthful passions for young ladies of maturer age, which so often afflict boys of tender years, and as for girls of his own age, they bored and even irritated him. I think this aversion for the opposite sex was mostly due to his shyness, and his shyness was largely due to his sensitiveness regarding his physical development. Certainly, his quarrels with Helen and the coldness which marred their meetings were directly the result of Helen's wild, unthinking ridicule, ridicule which Browne's sensitive nature seemed unable to counteract. As he grew older, his aversion for feminine society increased, and it was only by strenuous efforts that his friends could drag him forth to social functions.

Probably the saddest and most moving spectacle I have ever witnessed was when Browne, on one occasion, was induced to attend a private dance, the "coming out" of a young and pretty debutante. The ballroom was not particularly warm, but I could see the beads of nervous perspiration standing out on Browne's forehead as he tried to guide the pretty debutante through the intricacies of a dance with which he was not overfamiliar. He gallantly

did his best, but his best was hardly good enough for his pretty partner. After he had stepped on her foot for the third time, she became a little alarmed, and suggested "sitting out" the rest of the dance. Browne was more than willing. He escorted his fair partner to a seat in an alcove, and hurried away to get her an ice. I was able to witness what happened subsequently, as I too was "sitting out" near-by. Browne returned with the ice, but just as he was handing it to the pretty debutante, his foot slipped on the polished parquet floor, and in an effort to recover his balance he managed to slide that congealed but sloppy lump of vanilla cream off the plate into his partner's lap. She gave a little scream, and Browne's face crimsoned. Nevertheless, he acted promptly. He snatched out his handkerchief and wiped the sticky mess off the girl's dress, after which he applied the same handkerchief to his heated brow. The vanilla cream may have reduced the temperature of his brow, but it certainly did not improve his appearance. It left his forehead in the condition sometimes described as "clammy."

The pretty debutante was very nice about it. She smiled, but the tears were very close behind the smile, and she hurried away to her room. I am told that debutantes' dresses are special concoctions generally imported for the great event. Certainly, the dress in which she reappeared later in the evening was not quite so ethereal or Parisian as the former one. Indeed, one of my fair partners said that the second dress was unmistakably London. And the manner in which she said "London" put

the dress into the second-rate category without a chance of appeal.

Browne disappeared. The billiard-room was his hiding-place, and a sprained ankle his excuse for his absence from the ballroom. It was not until we were making our adieux to our hostess that I saw him again. He limped over to the pretty debutante, who was the centre of an animated group, and again the unkind hand of Fate took Browne by the neck and prepared to thrust him into trouble. The debutante was holding a huge bouquet of beautiful, long-stemmed roses. Browne edged his way through the group until he got close to her, then he said penitently, "Won't you please give me a rose just to show you have forgiven me?"

"But I am not sure that I have forgiven you, Mr. Browne," replied the pretty debutante, smiling.

This was the moment chosen by the cynical hand of Fate for its unkind thrust. Browne always claimed that some facetious Johnny kicked his game ankle and caused his loss of equilibrium. I think myself that the slippery condition of the highly polished floor was mainly responsible, but whatever the cause, the effect of Browne's loss of balance was disastrous. He made a wild clutch forward to save himself, and his hand encountered nothing more substantial than the bouquet of roses held by the pretty debutante. As drowning men are supposed to clutch at straws, so Browne clutched at the bouquet. As he sprawled forward to the floor, his hand raked the flowers from the grasp of their fair owner, and a shapeless mass of perfumed wreckage was all that remained of the beautiful bouquet.

The expression on the pretty debutante's features registered first, alarm ; second, annoyance ; and third, something very near to anger. I think it would have been anger if a saving sense of the ridiculous had not changed it to laughter. It was wild, hilarious laughter, in which everybody joined except Browne.

" You may keep all the roses, Mr. Browne," cried the pretty debutante, " just to show that I have forgiven you ! "

Browne tried to smile, but it was not a success. He expressed his regrets, his sincere regrets, his most sincere regrets. If there was any superlative way of expressing regrets, he wished it to be understood that he expressed them in that way. Then he smiled again, the sort of a smile that a shy man would smile under similar circumstances. As I have said, it was one of the saddest and most moving spectacles I have ever witnessed. After he had ceased regretting, I took him away ere the hand of Fate could propel him into more trouble. The next day, Browne asked me how he got out of the room. I told him that he walked out with me. He said he couldn't remember. In fact, when he awoke the next morning, he was quite ready to believe that it was all a dream, but his game ankle and the thorn punctures in his hands conflicted with the dream theory.

The pretty debutante has long been a happy wife and mother, but I am quite sure the memories of her " coming-out " ball will always include bouquets, vanilla ices, and James Wayinton Browne.

I am not certain of the date on which Browne

finally eschewed social functions which necessitated dancing. I only know that the time did come when his replies to invitations to such functions were invariably expressions of polite regret. And so in time it came to pass that Browne settled down into a state of happy, contented bachelorhood, and thoughts of the opposite sex troubled him not at all.

He was not to be classed as a woman-hater, rather might he have been termed a woman-ignoror. He was quite ready to admit that they had a place, and possibly an important place, in the great scheme of things created, but he was content, as it were, to view them from afar, and this distant aloofness in no way lent enchantment to the view. He sometimes admitted that the view was fair, even beautiful, but it left him untouched, unenchanted. I do not think that Browne was actuated by any feeling of masculine superiority. On the contrary, he seemed to be a believer in the equality of the sexes, although I never heard him define what sex equality meant to him. On the whole, Browne was a self-contented bachelor. Only occasionally would a note of discord jar the harmony of his life, but on those rare occasions, like a good many other self-contented people, the discordant note became the dominant tone of his erstwhile harmonious symphony, and for the time being, he would remain sadly and hopelessly out of tune. Just one false note, and discord reigned temporarily supreme in his consciousness. This characteristic of Browne was never more clearly exemplified than on the occasion when he met my sister, Helen, after an interval of several years.

It was in early summer. The old almond-tree had

put away her Spring dress of dotted pink and donned her garb of green. A breeze softly stirred the curtain at my lattice window, and straying across my desk, played gently with the leaves of my writing-pad. Three of us were waiting for tea ; Browne, who had settled himself with a book in the alcove window of my dining-room ; " Jimmy," who had curled himself in Browne's lap, to all appearances sound asleep, but with the white ear alertly erect ; and myself, pencilling the pad with many halting moments, with thoughts given more to the playful breeze, I fear, than to the work in hand. For the breeze brought a message which told me of quiet country lanes and fresh green foliage, of smiling fields and the song of birds, of the scent and taste of air that is washed and clean.

It was Helen who introduced to me the mysteries of rustic pedestrianism. In the early days of the occupancy of my chambers, Helen had pounced down upon me, dragged me from my desk, pushed me into a train, pulled me out at a certain station, told me to hold my shoulders back, to take deep breaths, and then started me on a " country walk." It had been a long time since I had seen the real country, but before we had reached our objective station from which we were to return to London, I had resolved that a longer time still should elapse ere I saw the country again. It was not just because Helen lost her way, and we wandered some four or five miles extra before we found our station ; it was not just because the sun shown fiercely for one-third of our walk, withdrew behind clouds for the next third, and allowed those clouds to weep copiously over us for

the last third ; it was not just because our walking-sticks could not take the place of umbrellas, nor our light summer clothing the place of mackintoshes ; it was not just these trifles alone which made me inwardly resolve to eschew country walks for a considerable time, if not for ever. It was because I had become a Londoner, at first perforce of necessity, but latterly by choice. Only twenty miles from London, yet the voice of the old Siren called, called, even as she calls to her devotees from the jungles and plantations of Burma to the silent places of the Canadian woods.

"Come back, come back," she calls ; and before the mental gaze of each weary exile she dangles the allurements which tempt him most. To the lonely exile in the Silent Places, she calls, "There is sunshine on Piccadilly to-day, the scent of petrol and the tarred wood blocks, the roar of traffic, the jostle of the throng ! Here is Life at its very centre ! Come back ! " To the exile in the brown, parched places, where the sun seems ever present and the sky seems ever brass, she calls, "A mist hangs over me to-day ; the rain drips, drips, and the parks are moist and cool and green ! Come back ! "

Helen had dragged me from the Siren's company, but the spell still held. She had lifted me out of the rut into which I had contentedly settled, and the broader aspect of the countryside did not satisfy. My work was interfered with, and the day was practically a blank. Helen attempted to comfort me. She said "country walks" to a town-dweller was necessarily an acquired taste, like olives. She said that after the third or fourth "walk," I would be

simply keen as mustard about it. I said I was doubtful. By the time I had hobbled painfully out of the London station, and climbed stiffly aboard a bus bound for my chambers, I was more than doubtful, I was dubious, which is, I believe, one degree stronger than doubtful. By the time I had climbed the stairway to my chambers, all doubt and dubiousness had vanished. I knew for a certainty that the acquired taste for "country walks" would never be acquired by me, nor would I ever develop a keenness for said "country walks," a keenness which Helen had likened unto "mustard."

But alas for human positiveness which is styled a "certainty"! Helen was right, I acquired the taste. Helen saw to it that I took the third and fourth walks, and then the taste became palatable and even desirable. I cannot say that the keenness I developed ever reached the "mustard" stage, but certainly the walks became quietly delightful, and, in spite of the neglected work at my desk, the call of London became less and less distinct, and interfered not at all with my enjoyment of rural scenes and sounds.

The advent of "Jimmy" provided a third member to our party, and as soon as he was old enough to "sit up and take notice," which was remarkably soon, he acquired a keenness for "country walks" which far surpassed the "mustard" stage. "Cayenne pepper" would but inadequately express the degree of keenness with which "Jimmy" contemplated and engaged in a "country walk." Not that "Jimmy" ever walked when in the country. To him, a "country walk" was a riotous

adventure of exploration and discovery through which he propelled himself in leaps and bounds and wild scurrying, being convinced evidently that walking, as a means of locomotion, was to be tolerated only in London when on the lead, and even then with reluctance and much straining and choking. "Jimmy" always led in the "country walk." He was always certain that a most exciting adventure lay just beyond the next stile or within the next patch of woodland. Failing to accelerate the progress of Helen and myself, he would dash forward alone to the waiting adventure and disappear for a while. At first, these disappearances caused us some anxiety and accelerated our progress considerably, but as we usually discovered "Jimmy" waiting for us beyond the stile or within the woods with his tongue lapping the breeze, and a contented grin on his countenance, we became less alarmed at his dashing leadership, and followed more leisurely.

It was "Jimmy," I remember, who discovered the "Wanderer" who was seeking "The Door in the Wall." Helen and I were following a footpath across a meadow somewhere in Hertfordshire. We could trace the footpath ahead to where it met a stile, on the other side of which ran a narrow lane bordered by hedges and a sparse growth of woodland. As usual, the undiscovered which lay beyond the stile called to "Jimmy" and he disappeared. He was not waiting for us on the other side of the stile, but some little distance up the lane we discovered him, a self-invited guest at the table of the "Wanderer." The "Wanderer" (so called first by Helen) was an aged tramp, his table was a newspaper

spread upon a grassy bank by the roadside, and as we approached we could see that he was sharing his meal with "Jimmy," who sat in expectant attitude before him. "Jimmy," at that period, was of an age when "all was grist which came to his mill." He was growing, and his appetite kept well in advance of his growth. "Jimmy" never seemed to catch up with his appetite. He ate all that came his way, was grateful, and asked for more. Therefore we were not surprised to see him eating, and the "Wanderer's" interest in "Jimmy" was plainly a kindly one.

"Jimmy" was the connecting link between us, the "Wanderer" was friendly and disposed to talk. Helen and I sat down on the grassy bank, glad of an excuse for a rest, for the sun was very hot and the breeze conspicuous by its absence. Our aged acquaintance said he had tramped a long distance that day, but he had only a vague idea of where he had come from, and he was still more vague about his destination. Like all trampers, he was ostensibly looking for work, but he said it was difficult for a cripple to get anything to do. He called our attention to what we had already noticed, namely, that his left leg below the knee was missing, and in its place was the usual wooden stump. As he talked, we gradually became interested in the "Wanderer," for his speech was a curious blend of educated style and the argot of the road. When he had finished his meal, I presented him with a cigar, which he lit and smoked with great enjoyment, while Helen drew him on to talk about himself. It seemed, from his story, that he was a North-country-

man. He had received a fair education, his father having been a prosperous tradesman ; but from his boyhood the call of adventure was in his blood. Three times he had run away from school, and made his way to Liverpool intending to ship as cabin-boy on some vessel bound for the far countries of which he had read and dreamed. Twice he was caught and brought back, but the third time he succeeded in stowing away on a sailing vessel bound for India. It was two years before he saw his home again. As he grew older, the restless longing to be up and away grew with him. When his schooling was finished, he tried to settle down into his father's business, but the smell of the East still lingered in his nostrils, and the hand of adventure ever beckoned.

"Ye see," said the old man reflectively, "it was just as if some one ye loved was all the time a' whispering to ye, 'Come ! Come !' It was no use me resistin'. I had to go."

He went. For ten years or more he knocked about the world, receiving perhaps more knocks than he gave, then came back to find his father dead and the business dying. He tried to resuscitate the business, but it was a hopeless task. About the time it gave its last gasp preparatory to its interment in the Court of Bankruptcy, he fell in love.

"Mary, her name was. Hair almost the colour of yours," he said to Helen. The "Wanderer" paused a moment and seemed to be thinking deeply. When he spoke again, he seemed to have forgotten what he had just been talking about.

"Have ye ever seen a wall with a door in it like that?" He traced the outlines of a door in the

dust of the road with his stick. "It has four panels, but diagonally across the left upper panel there's a cross-piece. When ye look at the door, ye can see the figure four a-standing out on it. Have ye ever seen such a door?" He looked first at me, then at Helen. Neither of us could remember having seen such a door, and the old man shook his head and gazed vacantly at the traced outlines on the ground. Presently, prompted by Helen, he resumed his story.

Mary had returned his love, but with no means to support a wife, marriage at that time was out of the question. They talked it over, and it was finally arranged that he should go out to Canada and take up some land. When he was settled, Mary would go out to him, and they would pioneer together. He went, worked for a year on a farm, then took up some land for himself. It was hard work, but things went well, and his letters to Mary were full of hope and confidence. In another year he expected to be able to send for her.

Then, rumours of a gold discovery floated down from the mountains to the north. A mere breath of a rumour it was, but as the story flew from farm to farm, it assumed larger and larger proportions. The old longing for adventure, dormant for a time, stirred within him again. The weary monotony of the farm work began to irritate him. The lure of the golden chance in the north dangled ever before his eyes as he toiled behind the plough gashing the virgin soil. One day, accompanied by two or three companions of kindred spirit, he abandoned his farm and started north,

For five years the wilds claimed and held him. For five years the prospectors' golden will-o'-the-wisp danced before him, mocking, eluding, but ever alluring him. One day while alone in the remote wilderness, his canoe overturned in a swift mountain stream, and he was swept away on the fierce current. Struggling and clutching desperately at the shelving banks as the water bore him along, he fought bravely until a sudden turn in the stream cast him exhausted upon a sandbar. Here he lost consciousness. An Indian found him, placed him in his canoe, and took him down-stream to the nearest Hudson Bay Company's post. He was delirious when they arrived, and the people at the post found that his leg was badly fractured below the knee. They did what they could for him, and while caring for him discovered something tightly clutched in his right hand. They forced his hand open, disclosing what at first appeared to be a rough, mud-encrusted stone. A closer examination revealed a gold nugget weighing some five ounces. When he regained his normal senses, he told them of his accident, but was unable to explain where or how he got the nugget. After a few days they sent him down to the nearest frontier town, and there, in the local hospital, his leg was amputated.

Three men at the Hudson Bay Company's post questioned the Indian and induced him to take them up-stream to where he had found the injured man. From there, they made a careful prospect along the banks up-stream, for they reasoned that the nugget might have been obtained in a desperate clutch at the bank as the torrent swept the unfortunate man

along. They were right in their deductions, for they found the pocket. It was only a limited alluvial deposit, and it did not take long to work it out, but it yielded a handsome return for their labours. With singular honesty and generosity, however, they divided the gold into four portions, and took one portion to the injured man in the hospital. It was a matter of several hundred pounds in value, and came as a godsend to him.

When he was well enough to leave the hospital, and his lost leg had been replaced with a wooden stump, an intense longing came upon him to see Mary. For five years he had not written to her. At first he deferred writing, hoping, as thousands of gold-seekers have hoped, to be able to return to her quickly with such wealth as could never be obtained in the back-breaking toil of the furrows. But as time went on, and the golden will-o'-the-wisp mocked and eluded him, he was ashamed to write, ashamed to tell her he had abandoned the farm. So the wilds claimed and held him. Now, after five years, with money in his pocket, he resolved to go back to England.

He went, but for days he lingered on the outskirts of the village where Mary was, longing to see her but ashamed of his timber leg. One day, however, he entered the village and asked for Mary. She had died a year before. They showed him her grave in the churchyard, and all the afternoon of a peaceful, summer day he had sat by the green mound absorbed in dumb remorse too intense for tears.

For a week he lingered in the village, then took to the road, wandering here and there with no objective,

and with no companion but his grief. Slowly but surely his money melted away, and in time the tramp-life of the road claimed and held him, even as the wilds had claimed and held him years before. One day, on a high road, he struck up an acquaintance with a fellow-wanderer, a man who had lost his right arm, and was known to other trampers as Lefty Bill. Their acquaintance ripened into friendship, and for a long time they wandered the country together from Land's End to John o' Groats.

"Bill and I were pals for a long, long time," said the old man, shaking his head slowly from side to side, "and like as not we would be together to-day if we hadn't found the door in the wall."

"Tell us about the door in the wall. What was it?" said Helen persuasively.

From beneath his shaggy, grey eyebrows the "Wanderer" gazed at us keenly.

"Ye'll just think I'm mad if I tell ye. Only now and then I tell about it, but no one believes me."

"I'm certain we both will believe you; won't we, Shad?" said Helen.

The sun was still hot, the road was dusty, it was pleasant to sit on the grassy bank and listen to the old man. So I said I was quite prepared to believe anything just then. After a little more urging on the part of Helen, and the gift of another cigar, our aged friend told us about "The Door in the Wall." It was a strange tale. I cannot vouch for its truth, but it had a sequel which concerned Helen and myself, and which, Helen said, amply proved the "Wanderer's" veracity. I want to give the story, as near as I can remember, in the old man's words,

omitting of necessity his accent and the argot of the road. As I recall the incident, I can see again the quiet lane, the old man with the wooden leg seated on the grassy bank puffing his cigar at intervals, the afternoon sun glinting through the trees across the way and casting their shadows upon the roadway where "Jimmy," newly returned from explorations among the hedges, sat peacefully panting upon the traced outlines of the door, and seemed to listen as attentively as Helen and I to the "Wanderer's" tale.

CHAPTER VII

"LEFTY BILL was a peculiar man," said the "Wanderer," stroking his grizzled beard. "I never knew how he lost his right arm. He never told me anything about his past, and I never asked him. I minded my own business, and I think he liked me because I did. I've seen others on the road try to 'pump' him. Bill would just look at 'em and never say a word, but his look was enough for most of 'em. Bill was born a gentleman, ye could see that. He worked with the rest of us when we got a job at harvestin' or what not, and it was astonishin' the work he could do with only one arm. He didn't seem to care for the money he got for his work. Like as not, he gave it to some poor devil who needed it. Bill always seemed to have money enough to pay his way, and he never begged like the rest of us.

"When he took up with me and we began to pal together, he wouldn't let me beg any more, and I never slept in a casual ward while I was with him. Sometimes he would talk to me by the hour about everything under the sun, except himself, and me a-listenin'. Then some days he'd plod along and never say a word. Bill wasn't a gloomy man, but I never heard him laugh, and only once did I see him smile, and that was the last glimpse I had of him."

The old man paused and absently tapped his wooden leg with his stick.

"Bill was an educated man," he resumed. "He always had a book or two in his pack. He knew all about the history of the villages and the old houses we passed in our wanderin'. He'd tell me the stories of the castles and the ruined abbeys. He knew all about the trees and flowers and plants, and never a bird piped a note but what he knew its name. Sometimes we'd tramp the road at night in summer, and Bill would tell me the names of the stars. He loved the stars. Some nights he'd take off his hat and stand quite still a-lookin' up at 'em and talkin' softly to himself. Bill had queer ideas about some things. He used to tell me that there was no such thing as death. He said it was just changin' one dream for another. You just stepped out of one phase of matter and entered another. He used to try to explain it to me, but, Lord bless ye, I couldn't grasp it, and after a while he saw I was hopeless and give it up.

"Once a year Bill used to go to London. No matter where we were trampin', when the end of May drew near, Bill used to make for London. He took me with him once. If I recollect rightly, it was on the 30th of May when we arrived. We came part of the way from the Midlands by train, Bill a-payin' for me. From the station we took a bus to the West End, and it was late in the afternoon when we arrived at a buildin' in a quiet, narrow street. I don't remember the name of the street, but I know it wasn't far off Piccadilly. Not a word had Bill said to me since we

left the station, and I knew better than to talk to him when he was in that kind of a mood. Bill entered a hall-way through a door which stood open and went up a stairway to the first floor, me a-followin' and wonderin' what his game might be. He fumbled at the lock on a door, tryin' one key after another, until I began to have my suspicions. 'Bill, old pal,' I whispers, 'if your game is burglarin', ye can count me out! I'm off!' Bill didn't say anything; he just laid his hand on my arm and looked me full in the eyes. I can't tell ye what I saw in his eyes, but it made me feel as how I could have followed him, no matter where he went or what he did.

"He finally got the right key and opened the door. We went in, and Bill locked the door behind us. He led the way through a short hallway into a room which looked like a library. It had stacks of books ranged round the walls on shelves. He raised the blinds at the windows and then I could see that the room hadn't been used for a long time. The dust lay thick on the furniture.

"'Sit down,' says Bill, 'and wait.' With that he went into another room, and I could hear water runnin'. Pretty soon he came back, and I saw he had been washing his face and hand, and his hair was brushed smooth. Without sayin' a word he went into another room and closed the door.

"I waited and waited, but Bill did not return, and I must have fallen asleep. I don't know how long I slept, but all on a sudden I found myself wide awake with every nerve a-quiverin' and me a-grippin' the arms of my chair like mad! Chills were runnin' up

and down my back, and for no reason that I could see I was afraid. It wasn't ordinary fear, mind ye. I wanted to run, yell, or do somethin'. It was like a wakin' nightmare. I could only sit and stare at the door through which Bill had disappeared. I don't know how long this feelin' lasted, but gradually it faded away and left me with but one idea ; to open that door and see what had become of Bill. I got out of the chair all of a tremble, stumped across the room as silently as I could, and turned the knob of the door. I was afraid it would be locked, but it wasn't, and I opened the door far enough to get my head inside. I don't expect ye to believe me when I tell ye what I saw——"

"What did you see?" asked Helen, breathlessly, for the old man paused.

"I don't care whether ye believe me or not," resumed the "Wanderer." "What I saw, I saw. It was a small room, and on the wall a-facin' me was a life-sized picture of a woman with the light a-shinin' on it. In front of the picture, Bill was kneelin' in the way I've seen fakirs kneel in the East before the shrines of Buddha. The face in the picture was a beautiful one, perhaps the most beautiful face I have ever seen, but as I gazed at it, the face seemed to be alive! Its eyes full of tenderness and sorrow were lookin' down at Bill, and its lips were movin'. Ye may laugh at me if ye will, but what I tell ye is true. What I saw, I saw! Only a moment or two, mind ye, for the eyes turned from Bill to me, and then it was just a picture like any other picture. I tell ye it was some time before I had courage enough to enter that room, but I

finally did, and touched Bill on the shoulder. He started as though I had waked him. He looked up at me in a vacant sort of way. 'Bill, old pal,' I says, 'what's the matter?' My voice seemed to bring him to himself again; he didn't say anything, but he got up off his knees and switched off the lights. Only stoppin' to get his hat, he hurried me out of the rooms and down into the street.

"Where now, Bill?' I says.

"Country!' says Bill.

"What about a bite to eat?' I says.

"Eat!' says Bill, fiercely. 'For fifteen years I've neither eaten, drunk, nor slept in this accursed city, and, so help me, God, I never will again!'

"With that he started me off for the station, and that night we supped and slept in a little country inn. The next morning Bill was like himself again. Not a word said he about that room in London, and not a word said I, but for many a long day whenever I closed my eyes, I could see that face in the picture, the face that was alive.

"Bill and I jogged on together, here, there, and everywhere. We kept away from the big towns. Even in winter Bill liked the little villages best. Once Bill had an idea he would like to tramp round the country across the Channel, and he took me with him. Bill knew the French lingo, but I can't say I enjoyed trampin' there, and I was glad when we got back to England again. It must have been a matter of two years or more after our journey to London, when Bill left me."

The old man paused so long that I was impelled to awaken him from his reverie.

"What became of Bill?" I asked.

"Oh, aye, Bill," said the old man, rousing himself. "I think I'll tell ye the rest of the story, since ye haven't made sport of what I've told ye so far. One summer, Bill and I were trampin' along in Bucks or Herts, I don't rightly know which. Maybe it was some other county, for I never paid much attention to where we went, leavin' it all to Bill. If I remember right, it was in June; anyway, it wasn't long after that journey which he took each year to London. It was late in the afternoon one day as we were trampin' along, and it came on to rain. It was one of those quiet, drizzly rains which soak into your clothes and makes ye feel clammy-like. We weren't near any village or inn, and Bill said we would likely have to shelter in some wood or farm-house. At the time we were passin' along a narrow lane. On the one side was a hedge borderin' some meadows, and on the other side was a high wall enclosin' a country estate. As we went along the lane, I spied at the end of the wall an estate-agent's board which said that the place was to be sold. I pointed it out to Bill, for many a time, mind ye, we had spent the night in that kind of a place. Sometimes it might be on the hay in the stables, and sometimes with the gardener or caretaker, if we found the right sort. It was a long wall and followed the windin' of the lane. Before we got to the end of the wall, just where it made a sudden bend, followin' the lane, I saw a door. The bend in the wall made a sort of angle, and in the angle was the door, and it was partly open with the key in the lock.

"What ho, Bill!" I says, laughin'. 'Here's

the door, and its got ' welcome ' written all over it !'

" Bill halted and glanced at the door. Then his gaze became fixed, and he let his stick and bundle fall to the ground. His face went white and for a moment I thought he was goin' to faint. I caught hold of his arm, but he pushed me aside and walked slowly towards the door.

" ' God ! ' I heard him mutter. ' If it be true ! If it be true ! ' He halted when he reached the door and stretched out his arm to push it farther open, then he shrank away and backed step by step across the lane until he pressed against the hedge, but always his gaze was on the door. ' At last ! At last ! ' he said, almost in a whisper.

" ' Bill, old pal, ' I cried, ' ain't ye feelin' well ? ' "

" He never answered me. He never even looked at me. He took off his hat, dropped it on the ground, and walked slowly towards the door again. He had a look in his eyes like I saw once in the eyes of a Mahatma in India. When he reached the door, he did not pause, but stretched out his arm, pushed the door open and went in. What made me follow Bill I never can tell ye, for I was feelin' pretty well scared by that time. I only know I did follow him, and when he passed through the door in the wall I was but a step or two behind him.

" When we got inside, I found we were in an avenue about ten feet wide formed by overarchin' trees and shrubbery. It was about fifty yards long, and lookin' ahead, I could see where it opened out on to a lawn with beds of flowers here and there. It was damp and gloomy in the avenue where we



*"He had a look in his eyes like I saw
once in the eyes of a Mahatma in
India" (p. 103)*

were, but out on the lawn I could see the sunshine. At least, I thought it was sunshine until I remembered the drizzly, soakin' rain outside ; then a chill went over me and I kept close to Bill, who went steadily forward. As we neared the end of the avenue, I could see that the light out on the lawn wasn't sunshine ; it was more like the afterglow ye see in Egypt after the sun has set, or which ye see sometimes on the snow-peaks in Switzerland. I hadn't much time to speculate about this peculiar light, for just then I saw somethin' else which made me halt quick and grab Bill by his empty coat-sleeve. Crossin' the lawn in front of the avenue came a group of women in white dresses, and their heads were bare. With them were children dancin' and runnin' about, and beyond I could see other people. I could hear them laughin' and talkin'.

" ' Bill,' I says, ' this is no place for us. The folks are at home. They're havin' a lawn-party or somethin'. Let's get out ! ' Bill never paused nor turned his head, and I stumped after him a-holdin' to his coat.

" ' Bill,' I says, in a husky whisper, ' all this don't seem right to me. Why isn't it rainin' out there ! ' Bill went on, never heedin' me a-tuggin' at his sleeve. In a few moments more we had reached the end of the avenue, and Bill stepped out on to the lawn. I tried to drag him back.

" ' Bill old pal, come back,' I says. ' There's somethin' wrong here ! Come back ! ' Then I let go his sleeve, for Bill stepped forward into that strange light which never came from the sun. I saw a woman leave one of the groups on the lawn and

start towards Bill. At first she came slowly, she seemed to hesitate, to be uncertain-like, then she came faster. She stretched out her arms, and her face was the face I had seen in the picture before which Bill had kneeled! Somethin', I don't know what, made me step forward to Bill's side and take a look at his face. He was smilin', and his eyes, lit up by the strange light, were shinin' with joy, a joy I can't describe to ye! For a moment only, he stood transfixed. Then he gave a wild cry of 'Elise!' and bounded forward with arms outstretched to meet that advancin' figure in white. With *arms* outstretched, I tell ye, for Bill's right coat-sleeve was empty no longer! I saw it, I tell ye, with these eyes! And that wasn't all, God knows! As I stood there a-tremblin', unable to move, another figure in white came a-runnin' over the lawn towards *me*! It was Mary! Mary, whom I had loved and lost so many years before! Mary, whose grave they showed me in the village churchyard! My brain must have cracked with the terror of it all, for I turned from her, and ran down the avenue through the doorway into the lane. I slammed the door shut and locked it. Across the lane, I crashed through the hedge and sped over the meadows mad with fear, for the old stump on my left leg was gone, and the leg was whole as the other! It's true, I tell ye! On, on I went, over fields, down lanes, into a high road, never tirin'! Anywhere to get away from that spot, and always I was a-cryin' to myself, 'It's a dream, a dream, a mad dream!'

"How far I ran or in what direction I never knew, but I remember it was almost dark when I stumbled

into a wood soaked with the rain which was still fallin'. There I must have sunk down unconscious, for there I found myself the next mornin', and—the old stump was on my leg as ye see it now."

"Perhaps it *was* only a dream," said Helen.

"So I thought," said the "Wanderer," "and I laughed when I saw my old stump. Then I turned round to tell Bill about it, but Bill wasn't there, and my hat and bundle and stick were gone. But I found I was holdin' somethin' tight in my right hand. It was this." The old man drew something from the bosom of his frowzy shirt, and extended it for our inspection.

"The key of the door!" said Helen, drawing a deep breath.

"Aye, the key of the door," said the old man. "And ye don't dream keys into your hands, do ye? I can't remember doin' it, but I must have drawn the key out of the door when I locked it, and took it with me."

I examined the key, which was attached to the old man by a string round his neck. It was a large key, old and evidently hand-wrought. The flat part of the handle was pierced with scroll-work round a more solid centre which took the form of the Roman numeral IV. The metal seemed to be bronze, but of that I could not be certain.

"Did you ever go back to the garden again?" I asked, when the old man had restored the key to his bosom.

"I never could find it again," he replied, shaking his head sadly. "For a long time I didn't want to find it. I was afraid. But as the years went by, and

I got older and older, I was very lonely. Ye see, I couldn't seem to take up with another pal after Bill. And every time I looked at the key, I could see Mary a-comin' towards me across that lawn. So one day I thought I would find the door and go into the garden again. But I couldn't find it."

I asked him how long he had been searching for it, but the old man could not remember exactly. Years, he thought, off and on.

"I don't think it's meant that I shall find it again," he said sadly. "I had my chance and didn't take it. Bill knew better. I don't think I shall ever find it now. Thank ye both for listenin' to me. It makes me feel better somehow to talk about it to people who don't laugh at me. Would ye like some music?" He fumbled in his pocket and brought forth a decrepit flute.

"Ye see, after Bill left me, I had to make my own way, so I took up the profession of music." He chuckled a bit. "Some people pay to hear me play because any kind of music is music to them, and others pay me to stop playin'. It's all a matter of how your ears are educated."

He played a tune or two. Helen said he played very well; but all flute music is mournful to me. As an antidote to cheerful spirits, it is to me infallible. So I placed a piece of silver in our old friend's hand, and suggested to Helen the advisability of continuing our walk by a short cut to the station, as the shadows were lengthening. We left the "Wanderer" sitting by the roadside, but we had gone but a short distance when Helen stopped.

"I should like to have that old key for my collection," she said.

"I did not know you were making a collection of keys."

"I am. That will be my first one," said Helen.

Obediently, I went back and attempted to open negotiations with our friend. It was some time before he grasped my meaning, but when he did, he was a trifle angry.

"Would ye sell the key if it was yours?" he asked fiercely.

"No," I said, "I don't think I would."

"No more will I!" he said. Then his fierceness died away, and he asked plaintively, "Do ye think it was a dream after all!"

"Who can say?" I replied. "You have the key."

"Aye," he said, nodding his head. "I have the key."

We left him sitting on the grassy bank, but the sound of his mournful old flute was our companion for some distance.

"Do you think it was a dream, Shad," asked Helen as we walked along.

"A dream or a story," I replied.

"You mean he either dreamed it or made it up?" asked Helen.

"Take your choice," I said.

"Then I won't choose either," said Helen. "I believe it is true."

"How could it be?" I asked, being a man.

"Because it is!" said Helen, being of the opposite sex.

Now for the sequel :

One day, about a year after we heard the " Wanderer's " story, Helen and I and " Jimmy " were " country-walking " in a part less than fifty miles from London. (For certain reasons, not well defined I'll admit, I prefer not to be more explicit as to the locality.) Neither of us had forgotten the old man's story, although we had ceased to speak of it. Walled gardens certainly possessed more interest for us, and on numerous occasions Helen lingered to examine more carefully doors in walls which bordered country estates.

On the day in question, we had penetrated to a part of the country where we had never been before. It was a warm day, and our path lay through a narrow lane in the grateful shadow of a high, rambling garden wall. Our thoughts and conversation were certainly not about the old man's story. They were chiefly concerned with the disappearance of " Jimmy." Leading the way as usual, he had unaccountably vanished. The hedge on one side was too closely grown to have allowed him to get through into the fields, and the wall on the other side seemed to be an insurmountable barrier. But he had disappeared, and whistling and calling had failed to produce him. Then suddenly, as we rounded a bend in the wall, a door which stood ajar offered the solution. " Jimmy," with his usual inquisitiveness, was exploring the garden within. Helen whistled and pushed the door farther open. As she did so, " Jimmy " bounded out, but Helen stood staring at the door.

" Shad, come here," she called. When I had

joined her she said excitedly, "Look at the door!"

I looked. I knew at once why she was excited. It certainly did look like the door described by the "Wanderer."

"And see, Shad, the key!" exclaimed Helen, drawing it from the lock. I examined the key. It certainly did seem to be very like the old key we had seen before.

"He's found it!" cried Helen, in awe-struck tones. "The 'Wanderer' has found the door in the wall! He has found Mary at last!"

"Nonsense!" I said, endeavouring to conceal a little excitement of my own.

"It isn't nonsense!" cried Helen, as she pushed the door wide open. "See! The avenue of trees and beyond is the lawn! I am going in!"

"Don't be silly, Helen, the people won't like you going in there."

"There are no people. Don't you see the place is 'to be sold'?" Helen pointed to a notice-board on the wall. "Just as the 'Wanderer' said," she cried triumphantly.

I tried logical reasoning with Helen. I pointed out that there might be similar doors and duplicate keys, and that it was altogether probable that there were many country estates exhibiting "to be sold" notice-boards. I also pointed out that admitting this was the door in the wall described by the "Wanderer," it did not prove the rest of his remarkable story, and so on. Helen was not patient with my logical reasoning. She was of that self-sufficient age when the word "Rot!" falls trippingly from

the tongue, and it so fell several times in the course of my brief discourse.

"I am going in," she said, when I had finished.

She went in, and I followed. When I called her attention to the fact that the avenue was not fifty yards long, she said that was a mere detail. When I said that what appeared to be sunshine on the lawn was really sunshine, she said, "Of course, to us!" We had barely entered the avenue when she pounced upon a small, circular depression in the turf of the path, and declared excitedly that it was the mark of the "Wanderer's" timber leg. She claimed that other marks on the turf at intervals were the effects of the same wooden cause. She said she needed only a magnifying glass to prove it by deductive reasoning, which, she said, was far superior to reasoning controlled by mere logic.

We came out on the lawn. It was a beautiful stretch of turf, spacious and well-kept; so well-kept, in fact, that I suspected the presence of the owners notwithstanding the "to be sold" board. My suspicions, however, were groundless, for not a soul appeared to be about the place. The house was a very old, rambling structure fronting on another lane. It was unfurnished, and dimly through grimy windows we caught glimpses of beamed ceilings and oak-panelled walls. For an hour or more we explored the place, hoping to come upon a caretaker or gardener, but in vain. The well-kept lawn and tidy shrubbery were, no doubt, due to the care of a gardener, but either he was absent or lived elsewhere. If he lived elsewhere, it must have been at

some distance, for no other habitation could we discern for quite a mile around.

At last we came back across the lawn to the avenue which led to the door in the wall. A silence brooded over the deserted place, a silence unbroken save by the hum of insects and the occasional twitter of birds. When Helen and I spoke, it was in subdued tones. It seemed almost like sacrilege to break this brooding silence. Even "Jimmy" forbore to bark, and, contrary to his usual habit, kept close to our heels. We paused at the entrance to the avenue, and turned for a last look at the scene. An old sundial stood in the centre of the lawn, and two white-winged butterflies circled in the air above it. It must have been the lingering influence of the "Wanderer's" tale which caused me to fancy that this brooding silence was not natural, and that with the departure of Helen and myself the hush which seemed to hang heavily over the place would be broken. Some such thought must have impressed Helen also, for suddenly she shivered slightly.

"I think we had better go now, Shad," she said, almost in a whisper. "It seems as if somebody or something is watching us!"

I laughed to relieve the slight tension which appeared to be oppressing us both.

"The 'Wanderer,' perhaps," I said lightly.

"Don't, Shad!" was all Helen said, as she led the way down the avenue to the door. "Jimmy" bounded gladly ahead and met us with wagging tail in the lane outside. Helen closed the door, and we proceeded on our way. Helen was immersed in thought, for she answered my remarks but briefly.

■

When we were about half a mile from the old house, she paused and stretched out her hand with upturned palm. On it lay the key of the door in the wall.



She paused and stretched out her hand with upturned palm

"I don't think I will start my collection with this. You see, Shad, there—there may be others besides the 'Wanderer.'"

"Yes, Helen," I replied gently, "there may be others."

So we went back to the door in the wall, and Helen replaced the key in the lock and left the door ajar, even as we had found it. We said to each other that we would come back some day and take a look at the place again, and if possible get more information about it—but we never did. I think we feared to disturb the idealism which gradually grew up in our thoughts regarding it, for we came to call it the Garden of the Seekers, and Helen was glad she had restored the key and left the door ajar.

CHAPTER VIII

BROWNE was not aware that he was to meet Helen on the particular day that he and I and "Jimmy" were waiting for the appearance of Mrs. Jarvis with our tea. For that matter, I too was unaware of it. Through the kindness of her Aunt Lorina, Helen had been for the past year at school in France, undergoing the process of "being finished," as she expressed it. She had mentioned in her last letter the date of her return, but it had slipped my memory. Consequently, Helen's sudden appearance was a surprise to me as well as to Browne and "Jimmy." It happened in this manner.

Browne was occupying an easy chair in the alcove of my dining-room with "Jimmy" curled up in his lap. He was absorbed in the book he was reading, while the incense of his powerful pipe floated languidly through the doorway and drifted in graceful but pungent waves over my desk. My pencil was jogging in a feeble, halting journey over the pad, and I gave but little heed when the door opened, and the rattle of cups and saucers betokened the arrival of our tea. From the corner of my eye, I saw Mrs. Jarvis bear the tray to the tea-table, but instead of announcing, as she invariably did, "Your tea

is ready, sir," the following words saluted my ears :

*" There was an old brother who lived in a slippah ;
When his sister served tea, he never would tip pah ! "*

There was a canine shriek of delight from " Jimmy " ; I dropped my pencil and turned around.

" Helen ! " I exclaimed.

I heard Browne exclaim " Helen ! " also. That is, he attempted to exclaim " Helen ! " but it appears that the sudden upheaval of " Jimmy " from his lap caused his book to come into violent contact with his pipe. The hot embers scattered over his hands and clothes caused such painful surprise that he was able to pronounce only the first syllable of my sister's Christian name. But there was no question as to the loudness and fervour with which he pronounced that one syllable. He explained and apologized afterwards. He said it was most unfortunate that he had stopped after the pronunciation of the first syllable, as it left his exclamation open to misconstruction. Helen was very nice about it. She said she quite understood.

Yes, it was Helen. And yet it was not the Helen I had seen off for France a year before. It was not the same Helen who had patted me affectionately on the head and told me to take good care of " Jimmy." It was not the same Helen who, as we waited for the train to start, cried a little, laughed a great deal, and munched chocolates between times, while her eyes danced and her red-gold pigtail flapped in the smoky breeze of Victoria station.

That Helen was a child, charming, whimsical, pretty, but still a child. This Helen who confronted me was a different Helen. The charm was still there, the whimsical mischief still danced in her eyes, the prettiness still remained, indeed it had deepened into beauty, but some subtle change had occurred, the exact nature of which I could not for a few moments understand. It was only as she turned her head suddenly to glance about the room that I understood. The flapping pigtail was gone, her hair had been "put up," Helen was a woman!

Then it was that I became conscious of the beautifully rounded outlines of her figure, the delicate peach-bloom of her complexion, the curve of her long, dark eyelashes, of her confident poise and freshness. The child Helen was gone for ever, but in her place was a glorified Helen. One does not regret the disappearance of the bud in the unfolding glory of the rose. So, when this new Helen placed her white arms around my neck and kissed me and said, "Dear old Shad!" it brought no vain regrets for the Helen who had disappeared for ever in the smoke of Victoria station.

About this time Browne appeared from the dining-room with his apologetic explanation, but Helen's reply, that she quite understood, did not seem to put Browne entirely at his ease. If anything, it increased his embarrassment. His countenance flushed, and he hastened to comment on the beastly weather we were having. As a matter of fact, it was a remarkably fine summer day. Browne himself seemed to realize the fatuity of his remark, for he immediately changed the subject.

"You have changed, Helen; I wouldn't have known you," he said.

"Really?" said Helen. "How funny! I don't think you have changed a bit, Jimmy. You always were——"

Helen did not finish her sentence, as Mrs. Jarvis at that moment entered with the delayed tea-cakes. I do not know what Helen intended to say, but Browne evidently jumped to a conclusion which did not please him. His flush deepened, and a distinct frown furrowed his brow. But Helen was now busily engaged in pouring tea and seemed blissfully unconscious of the effect of her unuttered word or words.

When, through the ministrations of Helen, it became evident that Browne and I were immune against the pangs of hunger until dinner-time, intelligent conversation became more possible. Some one, I think it was St. Paul, once said that there is a time for talking and a time to refrain from talking. Personally, I am of the opinion that a time to refrain from talking coincides with the time one is giving to the process of satisfying the appetite. I am aware that eminent physicians tell us that cheerful, sparkling, intellectual conversation during meal-time is a great help to digestion, but personally I have never been able to acquire the mental and physical efficiency which enables one to scatter gems of sparkling wit over a dinner-table, and at the same time keep pace with the courses. I have tried it, but the result is always the same. Either the gems do not sparkle or scatter, or my soup gets cold. Some people can do it, I know. I have seen them fire

volleys of epigrams, repartee, humorous stories, and even gossip across the table, and at the same time clear their plates and never miss a course. I don't know how they do it. I explained my dilemma to my friend Jones one day. He said to talk well at dinner, and at the same time satisfy the appetite, was a gift not vouchsafed as a rule to ordinary people. He offered to give me a few lessons if I would pay for the dinners, but his offer was lost in the pressure of other matters.

The nearest solution to the problem I ever came across was offered to me by a very charming lady who drew me for a partner at a seven-course dinner. As we were entering the dining-room with numerous other guests, she said to me, "Are you hungry?"

"Reasonably so," I replied.

"So am I," she said. "Let's make a pact! We must talk to each other of course, our hostess expects it; but there is no need to overwork our intellects to the exclusion of our food. Therefore, when I say to you, 'One, two, three,' you just reply, 'Four, five, six,' and so on. If you can manage to smile occasionally, or gesticulate gracefully with your fork, as you enumerate, it will help the scheme along; and amid the buzz and rattle no one need be the wiser."

"Splendid!" I said. And splendid it was, too. I have since learned that the idea was not a new one, but it was new to me at the time. We were the most animated couple at the table, but we did full justice to the excellent food all the same. I grew intensely interested in the game, and resolved to employ it thereafter whenever possible. But I found a flaw

in the perfection of the solution. I had forgotten the guest on the other side of me. At this dinner, it happened to be a stately and rather severe-looking lady of uncertain age. She was a stranger to me, and my attention had been given entirely to my charming partner and our conversational game. As we were consuming the entrée, however, the stately lady leaned towards me and made a remark. It may have been in the nature of a question, but I did not catch its purport. Immersed as I was in the numerical conversation game, I forgot for the moment that my partner in the game was on the right. I paused in the act of mastication, smiled brightly at the stately lady, and said, "Eighteen or nineteen."

I shall never forget the change which suddenly occurred in the lady's countenance. A glacial-like coldness joined the severe expression, and the two combined formed a startling contrast to the fiery gleam which darted from her eyes. She shrank away from me, and for the rest of the dinner ignored my presence in a marked and disconcerting manner. I saw at once the *faux pas* of which I had been guilty, but I could not explain without making matters worse, so I renewed the conversational game with my fair partner. All the while, however, I could see that my answer to the stately lady's remark was slowly travelling round the table, and I was becoming an object of absorbing interest to a dinner-party hitherto somewhat tinged with dullness. I sizzled in the heat of my embarrassment, my only relief being that as the story reached the younger members of the party, I noticed that it was received with bursts of silent merriment, and the

glances they shot at me were not unkindly. Indeed, one of the younger male members deliberately winked at me. In the drawing-room after dinner, I tried to muster up courage to inquire into the episode, but the amount of courage which came at my call was wholly inadequate. Therefore, unto this day I remain in ignorance as to the stately lady's remark and the reason for the young man's significant wink.

However, as I was saying, the conclusion of our tea enabled us to consolidate our fragmentary remarks into more intelligent conversation. Browne, under the satisfying influence of Mrs. Jarvis's tea-cakes, became more at ease.

"Well, Helen, your schooldays are now over," I said.

"Yes, Shad," she replied. "Behold in me the finished article! All the rough and angular portions of my mental furniture are now supposed to be smoothed and polished. I now know how to enter and leave a drawing-room correctly. I have learned what to do with my hands and feet when consorting with the 'best society.' I have been drilled in the use of the various steel and silver implements ranged about my plate at the dining-table. I can eat asparagus gracefully, and you and Jimmy have just witnessed the distinction with which I preside at the function of tea."

"I suppose you have learned to speak French," said Browne.

"Speak French!" exclaimed Helen. "I should rather think I have! I have encountered the French language on its native heath, and the

victory is mine. Would you like to hear me speak French ? ”

We both said we would. Thereupon Helen informed us in the language of France that the sister of the wife of the gardener was ill ; that the brother of the cook had broken his leg ; that the nephew of the coachman's father had measles ; and other health statistics of the neighbourhood. She then took us to an imaginary railway station, and, while Browne and I stood aside, made various inquiries of a distracted official as to the time of the departure of trains, the fares, and the registration of our luggage. Next, in a magical way, we were whisked to an imaginary restaurant, and while Browne and I sat hungry and expectant, Helen called the “garson,” and having demanded a knife, a fork, and a spoon, proceeded to order an excellent dinner consisting of soup, fish, entrée, fowl, and sweet, terminating with black coffee and cigars for her male guests. She boggled a trifle at the word “ fish ” and ordered “ poison ” instead, but the polite “ garson ” booked her order without smiling, for he evidently divined her meaning. When Helen had taken us to an imaginary hotel, interviewed the manager, inquired the charge for rooms, informed him that the charge was too high, ordered hot baths, soap, and towels, and finally tucked us all in for the night, she lapsed again into English and triumphantly awaited our comments.

“ Wonderful ! ” said Browne.

“ Marvellous ! ” said I. “ And all that in one year ! ”

“ Of course,” said Helen, “ my accent is not yet

perfect. Mlle. Lisette at our school told me that a correct Parisian accent was not to be acquired in a year's time. 'Mais non, c'est impossible!' she said. But she said most of my French could be understood if I was careful not to speak too fast. When I was not understood, she advised me to point, gesticulate, and speak English!" Helen's laugh rippled deliciously.

"So you quite enjoyed your year's finishing experience, did you, Helen?" I asked.

"Well, yes, Shad, in a way, I think I did. But it seems to me now that I enjoyed the looking forward to it more than I did the actual experience. Do you remember how excited I was when Aunt Lorina first mentioned the idea to me?"

"My recollection is still vivid," I replied. "You were handing me a cup of tea at the time in Aunt Lorina's drawing-room."

"So I was," said Helen, "and when I dropped the cup in order to clap my hands, you were very rude."

"The tea was very hot, you'll admit, Helen."

"Well, Shad, my excitement was excusable. One of my many dreams of happiness seemed to be coming true! As you know, I had never been away from home, and the prospect of a whole year on my own, and in a foreign country too, was enough to make me jump."

"Quite so," I said, "and being always sympathetic, I jumped with you."

"But after all," continued Helen, with the sudden air of one who has sampled the Dead Sea fruit and found its ashes unpalatable, "happiness is a relative term. Had I not been so happy here at

home with Aunt Lorina and you and "Jimmy" (Browne started, but instantly perceived that Helen meant the other "Jimmy"), I think I would have been very happy at the school. You know Shakespeare says, 'I would have loved Rome more if I had not loved Cæsar less,' or—perhaps it is the other way about, I always get it mixed."

"I am quite prepared to believe that Shakespeare said that," broke in Browne, laughing, "but I am sure Bacon never did." (Browne, by the way, was a rabid Baconian).

"What has Bacon to do with the quotation?" asked Helen.

"Nothing, absolutely nothing," replied Browne, still grinning.

"Then why drag him in?" asked Helen coldly.

Browne's grin faded away. "Why, er—because—er—Bacon really wrote what you quoted, but——"

"I thought you said he didn't," interrupted Helen sharply.

"No, that is, I mean to say, er—got a match, Shad?" Browne hid himself in a smoke cloud, while Helen gazed at him doubtfully.

"As I was saying," continued Helen, after a moment's pause, "I was happy at school in a way, but it did not come up to my excited expectations."

"Quite so," said Browne, emerging from his smoke-cloud; "anticipation is always the best of pleasure, and the worst of pain."

"Let me see," said Helen thoughtfully. "Who said that, Jimmy?"

"Why, I said it," replied Browne.

"I know," said Helen, "but who said it first?"

"As far as I know, it is original with me," said Browne.

"Are you sure?" asked Helen.

"I am not young enough to be sure of everything," replied Browne, with a slight, a very slight tinge of sarcasm.

Helen still gazed at him thoughtfully. "Who is your dentist, Jimmy?" she asked.

"Is this a change of subject?" asked Browne.

"Not exactly," replied Helen.

Browne flushed slightly, but gave the required information.

"Has he ever said it to you?" asked Helen.

"Said what to me?" asked Browne.

"'Anticipation is the best of pleasure and the worst of pain,'" quoted Helen.

"No," said Browne.

"Well," said Helen, "my dentist, just before he starts the little electric buzzer which sounds like a young sawmill in the mouth, always smiles, tells me not to be afraid, and quotes the exact words you used a moment ago. I thought possibly it might be a sort of formula which all dentists use, and that you might have got it from your dentist. Mlle. Lisette at school told us that what seemed to be originality was often an unconscious appropriation of another's mental pabulum."

Browne's flush deepened perceptibly.

"As I indicated before," he said, "to be cock-sure on any debatable question is to confess oneself lacking in experience. I am quite prepared on your assertion to renounce my claim of originality. It is quite possible that I may have unconsciously

appropriated another's mental pabulum, as you say, but I decline to admit that the said pabulum ever dropped from the mind of my dentist." Browne warmed to his subject and spread himself grandly in his chair.

"In the first place," he continued, "my dentist never smiles, he is a serious-minded man; in the second place, he never tells me not to be afraid, for such advice is quite unnecessary in my case; and in the third place, the only pabulum which he allows to escape from his mentality while engaged in his professional work is the terse but practical remark, 'Open your mouth wider, please!' Therefore, you will see how impossible——"

"I see," interrupted Helen, "but——"

"How impossible, I say," continued Browne, ignoring the interruption, "it is that I should have appropriated the quotation from him. On the other hand, I am prepared to believe that your dentist uses the quotation referred to while engaged in his professional work. I have heard that there are dentists who specialize in the treatment of nervous children!"

"Oh!" began Helen indignantly, but I did not hear the rest of her remark nor the subsequent verbal tilt which immediately followed; for with more than cinema suddenness, my mental vision was directed towards a scene I had once witnessed between Browne and his dentist. I happened to drop into Browne's office one day, and found him in the act of hanging up the telephone receiver. His face wore an expression termed "woebegone," but in his case the woe seemed to have no intention of

going, for he smiled not, and his gloom seemed deep and settled.

"Anything wrong, Jimmy?" I asked anxiously.

"Tooth," he replied briefly.

"Oh, is that all?" I said, much relieved.

"Enough, isn't it?" exclaimed Browne irritably.

"Why don't you see your dentist?" I asked.

"Going to. Just telephoned him. Says he can see me at twelve o'clock."

"That's all right, then," I said cheerfully.

"Is it?" said Browne, with the accent on the "is." He slammed down the roll top of his desk, grabbed his hat, and growled out a few instructions to his secretary.

"If you are going my way, I'll give you a lift," said Browne.

I accepted his offer, he hailed a hansom-cab, and we were soon bowling along towards the West End in that most sporting of vehicles now happily extinct. It was called a sporting vehicle from the fact that when the horse fell, it was always an even chance whether you went entirely over the dash or only half-way.

We had not gone far when Browne said, "Would you mind going round to the dentist with me, Shad? I'd like you to—er, meet him. Decent sort of chap."

"Certainly, Jimmy," I replied.

We had almost reached our destination, when Browne suddenly clapped his hand to his jaw and exclaimed, "It's gone, Shad! Doesn't hurt a bit! Won't have to trouble my dentist after all. He's a fearfully busy man. Come to think of it, I've simply

got to get back to my office to meet Jenkins ; most important. Hey, cabby," he called, lifting the trap-door in the roof, "drive back to Wood Street."

"Yessir," said cabby, turning his horse.

Browne had evidently forgotten that he was to drop me at my chambers, but I said nothing. It was not my busy day. We had almost reached Piccadilly Circus on our return journey, when Browne, who had been chatting gaily, suddenly cried, "Oh, blithering blisters !" (or words to that effect) shot his fist up through the trap-door, and commanded cabby to go to the address he first gave him.

"All right, guv'nor ! 'Ave your own way !" said cabby.

This time we reached our destination, and were shown into the waiting-room. Browne groaned when he saw the literature on the table.

"Can you tell me, Shad, why every dentist in the United Kingdom thinks it his sacred duty to have a copy of *Punch* on his waiting-room table ? Does he think people in my condition want to laugh ? They don't ! Misery loves company ! Why doesn't he have a "Foxe's Book of Martyrs" or something similar. It would have the effect of consoling you by making you think how much worse your own case might be. There would be some sense in that. Howling butterflies ! How that tooth aches !"

At this moment, an attendant entered and requested Browne to "Come this way, please." Browne looked at me pleadingly.

"Would you like to come along, Shad ? He's got a fine collection of er—machinery in there."

I went along. Browne started to tell the dentist

the history of the erring tooth from its earliest infancy down to the present time, but the dentist was an austere man, and did not listen patiently. He urged Browne gently but firmly into the comfortable but dreaded chair. Browne sank back into its embrace, closed his eyes and opened his mouth. The dentist fumbled among his instruments and finally selected a small mouth-mirror, which he inserted into Browne's mouth. The contact of the mouth-mirror with the troublesome tooth produced a surprising result. Browne gave one prolonged yell, then sat upright, grabbed a glass of water and began to rinse his mouth vigorously.

"Good job!" he cried. "Didn't hurt a bit! Wouldn't have believed it possible!"

The austerity of the dentist collapsed. He roared with laughter.

"The tooth isn't out!" he said. "I was only examining it."

"Suffering saucepans!" said Browne "I thought you had pulled it! Anyway, the pain is gone. That's all I wanted. Good day." And Browne tried to get out of the chair.

"Nonsense!" said the dentist. "The pain will recur. You had better have the tooth out; it is quite loose."

"Can't it be stopped, or crowned, or something?" asked Browne.

"No," said the dentist.

"Will it hurt?" asked Browne.

"Not a great deal," replied the dentist wearily.

"Hadn't I better take gas?" asked Browne.

"Good heavens, no!" replied the dentist.

"Don't be a baby!" The austere practitioner was rapidly exhausting his meagre stock of patience. Browne looked at me appealingly, then at his watch.

"You know, Shad, I've really got to meet Jenkins at one o'clock. Most important. Can't afford to miss him."

The dentist had by now selected his deadly instrument and waved Browne back into the chair. Browne opened his mouth again, but closed it suddenly, just in time to prevent the dentist's forceps entering.

"Just a moment," said Browne, "I wanted to swallow."

The austere gentleman snorted, but waited. Again Browne braced himself in the chair, closed his eyes and opened his mouth, and again at the critical moment his mouth closed and his eyes opened.

"Shad, old boy, would you mind holding my hands? I don't want to do any damage."

I grasped his hands, and again Browne braced himself and opened his mouth. This time the dentist was too quick for him. He deftly inserted a rubber gag which made it impossible for Browne to close his mouth. In another moment the forceps had closed on the offending molar, there was a slight twist, and the tooth was out.

If one can imagine a yell broken in half, or a shout cut off in its prime, it will convey some idea of the noise Browne made. Anticipation started a most terrific yell, and reality suddenly checked it in its course. In other words, Browne discovered that it wasn't anything near so bad as he expected.

As we walked away from the dentist's residence,

and I was slowly coaxing the numbness out of my crushed fingers, Browne said, "It only shows what determination and a strong will can do. Although my teeth are set in like rocks, I determined this morning not to pass another sleepless night. I told Higgins I would have that tooth out to-day."

"What did Higgins say?" I asked.

"He said, 'Yes, sir.' What did you expect him to say? Now, Shad," continued Browne, "you must come to lunch with me."

I reminded him about Jenkins.

"Jenkins be hanged!" said Browne. "I've earned a half-holiday, and I am going to spend it with you."

As the episode just recorded flashed across my mental vision, I indulged in an audible snigger. Then it was that I became conscious that the verbal tilt between Helen and Browne had reached an acute stage. Browne had risen from his chair and was striding about evidently searching for his hat, while Helen's heightened colour and flashing eyes portended danger. I hastened to lubricate the troubled waters.

"What a jolly thing it is for us three to be together again," I said. "Quite carries me back to the old days at Oaklands!" (Oaklands was the name of my boyhood's home).

"It does indeed," said Browne. "It recalls those days most vividly, particularly the excitement evinced by Helen over trivial controversies."

"I am not excited!" snapped Helen. "The pupils of Mlle. Lisette never allow themselves to become excited. We have been most thoroughly

drilled on that point. On certain occasions, we may permit ourselves to become animated, but never excited. Mr. Browne evidently does not distinguish the difference."

"The difference is not apparent to me," said Browne, "due no doubt to my lack of 'finish' on that point."



*He did not fall ; he just sat down on the step,
but he sat down hard*

He had just found his hat in the dining-room, and was entering the sitting-room as he spoke. I was about to sprinkle more oil on the disturbed waters, when Browne sat down. He did not intend

to sit down. I think I have mentioned that the floor of my dining-room is two steps above the floor of my sitting-room. Browne's foot slipped on the second step. He did not fall ; he just sat down on the top step, but he sat down hard. Helen gave one explosive gasp of laughter. Then suddenly, she seemed to remember that the finished products of Mlle. Lisette's establishment never laugh at another's misfortune. She stifled her laughter, and caught up "Jimmy" into her lap.

"'Jimmy'" she said, addressing, of course, the terrier, "you eat too much ; you don't take enough exercise ; you are much too fat !"

Helen's remark was most unfortunate, for at that moment Browne's state of mind was such that he attached a double and personal meaning to the remark. With great dignity he arose and said, "I regret, Shad, that your sister still finds pleasure in sarcastic allusions to the proportions of my physique."

"Not at all, Jimmy," I said, hastening to the pacification of the waters with my oil-can, "Helen meant the other dog, er—that is, I mean to say——"

This time Helen shrieked and buried her face in her handkerchief.

"I quite understand what you mean, Shad," said Browne, "but I have yet to receive Helen's assurance on the point."

Helen's laughter ceased, and she became frigid.

"I fear any assurance I could give Mr. Browne in his present state of mind would be of small value," she said.

Browne strode towards the door, and said, "I thought you had changed, Helen, but I see I was mistaken. You are just the same spiteful little Helen; and I have no doubt that after all these years you still claim that tennis ball as yours."

"It was mine!" cried Helen defiantly.

Browne opened his mouth to reply, thought better of it, closed his mouth and opened the door instead. He exited, and the way in which he closed the door spoke louder than words. Helen fired her last verbal shell. I do not think Browne heard it, for the panels of the door interrupted its flight. It took the form of the word "Glob!"

Then Helen sat down and dabbed at her eyes with an absurd little square of cambric.

"Don't cry, Helen," I said, patting her shoulder. "He will get over it all right."

"I'm not caring about him," said Helen, shaking her head, "I am thinking about the beautiful polish Mlle. Lisette gave me. It's—it's all blurred and scratched! *Je suis désolée!*"

CHAPTER IX

BROWNE appeared at my chambers the next morning while I was still at breakfast. He was deeply apologetic for the part he had played in raising the tempest which troubled the placid waters of our social intercourse. He said he couldn't imagine what it was came over him. He could not sleep a wink during the night for thinking about it. He said it so obsessed his thought that it was some minutes before Higgins could make him understand it was eight o'clock and his bath was ready. In fact, it was only when Higgins shook him that he was roused from what he called his reverie.

"Why is it, Shad," he said, settling down into an easy chair, "why is it that I am so infernally sensitive about my weight? There are plenty of men who are twice as fat—er—stout as I am, but they don't seem to mind being twitted about it. I am not naturally of a sensitive disposition. You might twit me as much as you pleased about any other of my physical defects, and the Lord knows I am not an Adonis, but just hint about my adipose tissue, and my temper starts up like the fur along the spine of my namesake 'Jimmy.' Why is it?"

"Well, Jimmy," I replied, "I imagine we all have our little sensitive spots, some one thing and some another. I once knew a man who possessed this

idiosyncrasy in a very marked way. He was a printer down in the press-room of the defunct journal with which I was connected. He was an Irishman, and his name was Dan. He was not a



Dan

handsome man. He squinted, his ears were large and stood out, his chin receded, his legs were bowed, and he had a black front tooth, due to a blow he had accidentally received when a boy. Curiously enough, the black tooth was the only thing he was sensitive about. It certainly was not pretty, but compared to his other physical defects, it was a beauty-spot. He had never been to a dentist, was mortally afraid of them. It didn't take the other men in the press-room long to discover Dan's sensitive spot.

Of course, they did not fail to twit him about his other physical peculiarities, but Dan never seemed to mind; he cheerfully twitted in return, and with considerable success too. It was only when they attempted to use his black tooth as the basis of their witticisms that the fighting Irish in Dan was aroused. The pressroom was the scene of several lively scraps, due to this sensitiveness in Dan. One in particular I remember was caused by a linotype operator with a refined sense of humour. He blackened one of his own front teeth with printers' ink, and placing himself in front of Dan, smiled broadly. In less than two seconds Dan provided a job for a dentist, as the linotype operator and his blackened tooth parted company. I think two other teeth went with it. After a while, those

who knew about Dan's sensitive spot found it healthier to refrain from allusions to it. As a safe way of exploiting the joke, they would sometimes urge an unsuspecting new-comer into the danger-zone.

"One day, hearing sounds of tumult in the press-room, I entered just in time to see Dan emerging triumphantly from what seemed a rather sanguinary battle.

" 'What's the trouble, Dan ? ' I asked.

" 'Sure, the spalpeen wanted to see me black tooth ! I told him the only way to see it was through a black eye ! And I give him wan ! Maybe 'twas two I give him ! ' added Dan, contemplating his bruised knuckles.

"Dan would never allow his unfortunate tooth to be seen if he could avoid it. Although of a cheerful disposition, he refrained from laughing or smiling if it was possible to do so. He would chuckle internally, and his eyes would twinkle, but he kept his mouth shut tightly. Even when talking to any one, his hand would stray up over his mouth. I got pretty well acquainted with Dan, so much so that I asked him one day why he didn't grow a moustache and stop scrapping about that tooth. The idea was evidently a new one to him. He looked at me earnestly ; that is, one eye looked at me, and the other seemed to be directed to a point about five yards to my left.

" 'Holy snakes ! ' he said, ' I nivir thought of it ! I'll plant wan to-morrow ! ' "

"It was some time before the desired length of fringe was attained, for the growth was slow and Dan's upper lip was long. But the time came when

the black tooth retired into obscurity, and the wiry moustache curving disgracefully down over the lower lip reminded me irresistibly of a walrus. The resemblance was noted by his comrades of the press-room, and thereafter Dan became known as the 'Walrus.' But Dan didn't mind. The black tooth was hidden and forgotten, and the sensitive spot was healed. His smile was ever ready, although we couldn't see it. The only evidence we had that Dan was smiling was the fact that his eyes twinkled and his cheeks bulged out on either side of his preposterous moustache. I do not know how he managed to take his food. The men used to say that Dan took his beer through a rubber tube. However, Dan was always grateful to me for my suggestion."

"As of course he should have been," said Browne. "And having been so successful with Dan, perhaps you might like to take my case under consideration. Dan's gratitude would be nothing as compared with mine if you can effect a cure; but—for heaven's sake, don't recommend exercise!"

"Why not?" I asked.

"I've tried exercise, in fact I am constantly exercising, but it does no good," said Browne.

"Now, Jimmy," I said, "be honest. The only exercise you take is sitting at your desk, or on a Board, and lying in a remarkably soft bed all night. Am I right?"

Browne laughed. "You forget, Shad, that I am constantly running up an account at my tailor's, I frequently jump at conclusions, and more often than not I ride hobbies!"

"Not to mention your occasional participation in the social swim," I added.

"Nor my wrestles with financial problems," continued Browne, grinning.

"Seriously, Jimmy," I said, "have you ever tried walking in the country?"

"Wasn't I born in the country?" replied Browne. "How do you suppose I got about? Do you think I was carried in a palanquin?"

"Of course, Jimmy, I know you and I made good use of our legs in former days, but how has it been since you have lived in London? You take a taxi or your motor at the door of your flat in the morning, and are whisked up to your office in the city; at lunch-time you take a taxi to your club and return; at tea-time, if you honour me with your delightful company, you arrive in a taxi, and nine times out of ten Jarvis exercises his lungs with a cab-whistle on your behalf when you leave. Really, Jimmy, your legs connect the upper part of you with the ground, and that's about the extent of their usefulness."

"Wait a moment, Shad, just a moment," said Browne. "You forget something. Although I was not one of the pioneers of motoring in this country, I once owned a motor-car which would have delighted the heart of the genuine pioneer. That car made walking in the country a necessity to its owner, did it not?"

"It did, Jimmy, it did! I had forgotten that car!" Then I laughed and Browne laughed. "Let me see, it was a French car, wasn't it? We gave it a name."

"Yes, we named it 'Fifi,'" said Browne.

"Fifi! That was it. Dear old Fifi!" Browne and I laughed reminiscently.

How pleased Browne was when he bought that car! How delighted he was to lift "Fifi's" bennet and explain to his friends about her carburettor, her sparking-plugs and cylinders, and tell us how many miles she could do on a certain amount of feed. Compared with the luxurious cars of the present day, "Fifi" was not a handsome car. I was not then and am not now very well versed in the technique of the motor-car, but I remember that Browne's car had a great many "horse-powers" concealed in its interior, some of which were discovered and utilized, while others could never be found. By careful packing, the body would hold four passengers, providing they were not all built like Browne. The two back seats were facetiously referred to as "tin-cans," being shaped like exaggerated fruit tins.

As Browne knew nothing about motor-cars when he bought this one, the agent furnished him with a book of instructions and a mechanic who undertook in two weeks' time to initiate Browne into all the mysteries and ceremonies incidental to the sport of motoring. The agent promised Browne that after two weeks' instruction by this mechanic, he, Browne, would know the car from A to Z; would know how to drive it, feed it, clean it, how to put it to bed at night and wake it up in the morning. He said he, Browne, would know how to detect symptoms of infantile trouble in its interior, and would know instantly what remedy to apply. He

said, in case of serious internal disorder, Browne would be qualified to perform any necessary major operation, such as taking the engine apart and reassembling it.

I do not think Browne really believed that all this knowledge would be his in two weeks' time, even with the aid of a French mechanic. In fact he told me he thought it would take as much as three weeks. If I remember rightly, the mechanic was with Browne six weeks before all the aforesaid knowledge was stowed away in Browne's consciousness. The mechanic no doubt did his part faithfully, but unfortunately, like "Fifi's" horse-powers, a good deal of the knowledge stowed away by Browne could never be found when urgently needed. During the six weeks I saw but little of Browne. Occasionally, in the evening after dinner, he would drop in, but he was not a lively companion. From his conversation I gathered that his motor schooling was progressing, and that he hoped to graduate with honours soon. He babbled of petrol and tyres, punctures and back-fires, lubrication and ignition, and most of the time he nursed bruised fingers and complained of a crick in the back. After his second pipe, he generally trailed away into a troubled dreamland, from which I had eventually to recall him and consign him to the care of Jarvis, who sent him home in a cab. Jarvis was rather concerned about Browne. After assisting Browne into a cab one night, he said to me, "Mr. Browne doesn't seem like himself, sir; I 'ope it is nothing serious."

"Only a bad attack of automobilitis," I replied.

"Really, sir?" said Jarvis. "I 'ope it's not catching."

"No fear, Jarvis," I said; "it only attacks rich men. You and I are safe for the present."

"Yes, sir," said Jarvis quite gravely. I never could be certain whether Jarvis knew a joke when he saw one, or not.

Once and once only, at Browne's invitation, I went motoring with him during his six weeks' probation. The French mechanic drove the car, and viewing the event in the light of later experiences, I figuratively take off my hat to that mechanician. He was no doubt a disguised magician, for his control of that car was nothing short of marvellous! It ran as smoothly and silently as cars could run in those days; it responded to his slightest touch with alacrity. On clear stretches of country road we developed a speed which charmed by the very fascination of its danger. One-half of my consciousness said, "I can see my finish!" the other half said, "Faster! Faster!" At one point on the North Road, Browne said, "Let me drive a while, Alphonse."

"Oui, monsieur," said Alphonse, a little reluctantly, I thought. Then he looked back at me in the "tin can" and said, "Perhaps monsieur would like to walk a bit, to what you call, stretch ze legs, is it not so? We will come back."

I was about to reply that I did not care to walk, when I saw an expression in Alphonse's eyes which decided me to "stretch ze legs" a bit. He stopped the car, and I got out. Browne took his place at the wheel. There was a roar, an awful grating of

gears, I heard Alphonse yell, "Release ze brake, monsieur!" and then the car went wobbling faster and faster down the road until it disappeared to my view round a bend. I could hear it for some little time as I sauntered along, and once I heard a sound like a Maxim gun in operation, but soon the quiet and charm of the country claimed me. An hour or more went by, and I had just begun to think I had been abandoned, when I heard the car returning. As it drew nearer, I saw that Alphonse was driving, and when he stopped to pick me up, I thought he looked pale. There was perspiration on his brow, and his hands trembled. Browne was in high spirits.

"Sorry you didn't stay in, Shad," he said. "You would have seen what the car is jolly well capable of doing. I rather think I made our friend Alphonse sit up a bit! You didn't think I could drive like that, did you, Alphonse?"

"No, monsieur," replied Alphonse, and I thought he shuddered slightly.

"Of course," continued Browne, "I don't know it all yet. I need practice. My steering isn't quite perfect, and I sometimes forget which is the foot-brake and which is the accelerator, but that happens to all beginners, eh, Alphonse?"

"Oui, monsieur," replied Alphonse gloomily, "to all ze beginners and sometimes—ze enders!"

We dropped Browne at his flat, and Alphonse took me back to my chambers. Before parting from Browne, I thanked him for the drive, and he said, "I'll take you out alone some day soon. It will be good practice for me, and teach me not to depend on Alphonse."

As I descended from the car at Charingbank Chambers, Alphonse leaned over and beckoned to me.

"Pardon, monsieur," he said very earnestly, "but go not yet out wiz Monsieur Browne, no, not yet. Mon Dieu, he drive like ze devil, but not so careful! My heart he go fleep-flop! I shake, I tremble, I go white in ze face! No, monsieur, not yet. Monsieur Browne is not what you call ze feenish!"

I thanked Alphonse and resolved to take his advice.

As time went on I heard more encouraging reports of Browne's progress; nevertheless, it gave me a considerable shock when Browne dropped in one evening, threw up his arms and said, without any preliminary words, "Well, I've seen the last of Alphonse!"

"Good heavens!" I cried; "poor Alphonse! How did it happen? Were you driving?"

"Don't be an ass, Shad!" said Browne. "I am only telling you Alphonse is dismissed. I have graduated. I am senior wrangler of the College of Motoring! If there is any old car you want wrangled, just trot it out!"

I was relieved, but Browne gave me cause for renewed anxiety by his next remark.

"I am going to take the car out alone to-morrow, and I want you to come with me. It's to be a holiday for both of us. I've got the car in a lock-up in the mews back of my flat. Meet me there at ten o'clock to-morrow morning. I've mapped out a splendid run, I've got a jolly lunch-basket, and

Higgins will see that it is loaded to the gunwales. It's to be a great event, for I am going to christen the car. I've thought of a name for it. Guess what it is."

I shook my head in a "give-it-up" manner.

"Fifi," said Browne fondly; "and you shall perform the ceremony, break the bottle, you know."

"Champagne?" I asked.

"Ginger beer," said Browne.

What could I say? I tried the usual excuses of the busy day, important work, previous engagement, etc., but when I saw Browne's face begin to lengthen and his enthusiasm wane, I said, "Hang the work, Jimmy, I'll be with you at ten o'clock."

"Good!" said Browne. "Now I'm off. I've got a bit of adjusting to do to the car before I turn in."

I spent a rather restless night. At breakfast I mentioned to Jarvis that I expected to be away all day, as Browne was taking me for a run in his car. Jarvis looked rather concerned, but expressed the hope that I would have a pleasant day. As I was leaving, Jarvis met me at the street entrance.

"I suppose there are no instructions you would like to leave with me, sir?" he said.

"No, I think not," I said.

"Very well, sir; good day, sir," said Jarvis.

The tone in which Jarvis said "Good day, sir," did not tend to elevate my spirits. "Good-bye for ever!" would better have suited the tone.

Browne was waiting for me at the lock-up in the mews. He said he had been there since seven o'clock getting things in shape. I expressed surprise.

He said there was considerable work connected with the sport of motoring, but the car was nearly ready. Then his head and arms disappeared beneath the car for a little while. It was ten-thirty when I helped Browne push the car out of the lock-up. Then Browne donned a heavy ulster lined with leather, put on a ferocious-looking cap, adjusted a pair of gigantic goggles over his eyes, and inserted his hands into a pair of buckskin gloves with heavy gauntlets. I viewed these preparations with dismay. My costume was a light summer suit and a straw hat.

"Wait a moment, Jimmy," I said; "I'm new to this game. If it's to be a North Pole expedition, I'm not properly outfitted."

"Oh, you are all right," growled Browne; "it's only the owner-driver who has got to wear these things."

"Why?" I asked.

"Because he is the owner-driver!" replied Browne, with scorn at my ignorance. "Have you ever seen anybody but the owner-drivers wearing them? Do ordinary passengers wear them?" I shook my head. "Well then!" said Browne.

All was now ready, the lunch-basket was stowed under the back seats, Browne locked the garage, and after several tremendous tugs at the starting-handle the engine began to roar and rattle. Browne climbed into his seat at the steering-wheel, and I took the seat beside him.

"Now for the christening!" said Browne, handing me a stone bottle of ginger-beer. "The bottle's too

thick to smash on the bonnet ; just draw the cork and pour it out."

It was a great moment. Gathered round us were the inhabitants of the mews, including coachmen and ostlers with their wives, families, and dependents, numbering among the latter numerous dogs of various breeds and barks. I rose to the occasion. I also stood up. I unscrewed the cork, solemnly poured out the fizzing liquid on the polished bonnet, and cried in a loud voice, " I christen you ' Fifi ' ! "

" Fifi ! " echoed Browne.

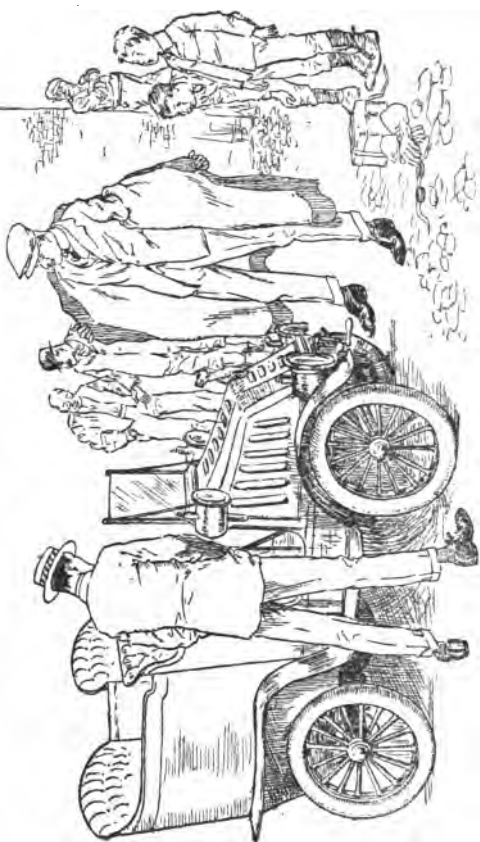
There was quite a cheer from the assembled children, and the dogs barked. Browne released the brake, threw in the clutch, and pressed the accelerator. At any rate, I think Browne told me afterwards that he did this, but to my inexperienced eyes he seemed to be juggling with levers, pistons, and pedals innumerable. There was a horrible grating roar, the car shook violently, I resumed my seat with alacrity and considerable force, and then—the engine stopped. Browne pushed some levers and pedals in a hopeful sort of way, but " Fifi's " horse-powers balked. It may be that " Fifi " did not like the name bestowed on her. It may be that she was of a refined and serious turn of mind, and the name " Fifi " sounded to her flighty and frivolous. Whatever the cause, " Fifi " sulked.

I got out and looked at the car, but it did no good. Browne got out, raised " Fifi's " bonnet, and had a look. No result. He twirled the starting-handle until I felt sympathetically quite exhausted, but " Fifi " made no sound. Then Browne took off his leather-lined ulster, his gloves, and cap and

goggles, and went to work on "Fifi's" internal arrangements. I did all I could to assist him. I fetched tools until the ground was strewn with weird-looking implements. I held things and handed things, while Browne screwed and unscrewed and tapped and tightened parts. At regular intervals he would say, "Now then!" and proceed to twirl the starting-handle, but nothing came of it. Occasionally I would ask what were meant to be helpful questions. I asked him whether the horse-powers had been fed lately, whether the axles were sufficiently greased, and whether he had remembered to light the ignition. At one time I thought I had discovered the cause of "Fifi's" inaction. I found that the speedometer on the dash was not working. I mentioned my discovery to Browne, but he was not grateful. He said there was something else not working. He said my intelligence was evidently on strike. Of course, after that I ceased searching and just waited. At twelve o'clock, Browne admitted defeat, and we sadly pushed the car back into the garage. We had a wash-up, and then Browne distributed the contents of the lunch-basket among the children in the mews. He said he simply couldn't face Higgins with that basket of food untouched. We lunched at a favourite restaurant and afterwards went to a *matinée*, for we both felt it would be a sinful waste of our holiday to go back to work again that day.

As time went on, Browne became better acquainted with the peculiarities of "Fifi's" temperament, but I am certain he never attained that intimacy of understanding which characterized the relations

Then Broune took off his leather-lined visler, his gloves, and cap and goggles, and went to work on "Figs" internal arrangements



between her and Alphonse. But then, as I have said before, Alphonse was no doubt a disguised magician. His control over "Fifi" could not be explained otherwise.

I am tempted at this point to narrate part of the subsequent history of "Fifi" as related to the compulsory country walking mentioned by Browne. I realize of course that a mischievous side-current has drifted us far from the point where Browne and I were laughing reminiscently at the beginning of this chapter, but when drifting, what matter the course so long as the weather be fair? Besides, I am almost certain that the current is a circuitous one, and that we shall in time return to Browne's reminiscent laughter, and perhaps (who knows?) to the "lost idea" of Chapter I.

CHAPTER X

BROWNE soon tired of caring for the car himself. Having once learned its mechanism and the method of caring for it, the mere manual labour of keeping it clean and in order soon failed to appeal to him. Browne was an immaculate man as regards his person and attire. After the first enthusiasm began to wane, the adjustment, oiling, repairing, and cleaning of the car became repugnant to him.

"It's a dirty job," he said to me one day, "and my time is too valuable to waste on it."

Therefore Browne hired a chauffeur, but the place at the steering-wheel remained Browne's. For a long, long time he would not resign that. To be sure the chauffeur drove Browne to and from his office, but when on pleasure runs or tours, the chauffeur, if with him, was "tinned" in the rear of the tonneau, while Browne grasped the wheel and worked the pedals and levers.

"The owner who doesn't drive himself," said Browne, "might as well be in a railway train, as far as pleasure is concerned. Think what it means, Shad; I sit here at the wheel with forty horse-power stored in the engine before me."

(I do not think "Fifi" ever developed forty horse-power, but at that period Browne used to brag about "Fifi's" power, even as the disciples of

Izaak Walton brag about the weight of their finny victims.)

"Think what it means," said Browne again; "that gigantic force lies there dormant. I touch a pedal, it springs into action! But it is a blind force. Uncontrolled and undirected it would be destructive. Even as the unloosed hurricane, it would spread havoc in its pathway!"

(I quite believed this, for even under Browne's control I had seen it kill chickens, bowl over a sheep, chase a cow, and lame a dog. Once, still under Browne's control, I saw it mount a bank, tear down a panel of fencing and attempt to enter a gentleman's garden, purely for the purpose, it seemed to me, of destroying his rose-bushes. What it might have done uncontrolled, I shuddered to think!)

"But," continued Browne, "by intelligent manipulation of these levers and pedals, I harness, restrain, and control this blind force, and direct it into useful and harmonious action. That is what makes motoring so fascinating to me. I love to think that this force, powerful enough to destroy both of us, becomes, under my intelligent touch, a faithful, obedient, and harmless servant. It goes to show how the ascending thought of man is becoming more and more conscious of its ability to harness and control material forces, and direct them into serviceable channels. For example, I am firmly convinced that the cyclones which sweep with such devastating force over the plains of Western America will some day be utilized to run gigantic windmills which in turn will produce and store up enough

electric energy to operate every factory in America ! Look at the heat which pours down on the deserts of Egypt and the Sahara ! Millions of heat units going to waste every day ! I am convinced that a method will be found to consolidate these waste calories into briquettes, which will be sold on the streets of London, just as the best Welsh nobbles are sold to-day ! Take all this talk about Daylight Saving Bills ! We don't need Daylight Saving Bills, what we need are Daylight Saving Companies ! Think of the light which has poured down upon the earth's surface ever since time began ! Then think of the miserable substitutes we have evolved to take its place at night ! Why not store up the light during the day and shed it forth at night where needed ? The genuine article, not the piffling substitutes we have been arrogant enough to call light ! Then there's air ! Shad, the time will come when companies will pipe the air from the ocean and country into our great cities, and enable you to enjoy a sea-breeze or the scent of the clover-fields bathed in dew, simply by turning a tap ! "

I loved to hear Browne talk like that. I could sit for hours and listen enthralled. The only drawback was that occasionally he would talk to me in similar strain while controlling that forty horse-power contained in the interior of "Fifi." On such occasions, I confess to nervous qualms which prevented me from fully appreciating my privilege. Particularly was this the case when Browne would let go the wheel and gesticulate with his hands to emphasize some point. For then "Fifi's" force would become blind again and start off on some

errand of destruction. Usually, Browne brought it under control again in time to avert most of the destruction, but it was disconcerting to me nevertheless.

On one occasion an attempt of Browne to talk in the manner aforesaid and at the same time control "Fifi's" force, enabled us both to have a walk in the country. As exercise, the walk was a blessing, but not an unmixed blessing. We were motoring through Wales alone, for Browne had left his chauffeur at home. It was rather a risky thing to do, for Browne at that time was not as well acquainted with "Fifi" as he ought to have been. He admitted it himself. We left Bala after lunch one day for a run to the charming village of Bettws-y-Coed, about twenty miles away. It was a hot day in midsummer, but the scenery along our route was so beautiful that Browne shut off most of "Fifi's" force, and we merely sauntered on our way. Browne loved beautiful scenery, and as the roads following the winding streams penetrated the lovely valleys, or mounting higher disclosed to view the vista of pine-clad mountain slopes or rocky ridges purple-tinted with the bloom of heather, Browne's soul expanded and his talk began to flow. He seemed almost inspired. Topic after topic jostled each other as, in their turn, they were considered, polished, and dismissed. He fairly rioted in speech. When prose seemed inadequate to express his appreciation of the exquisite little gems of scenery suddenly disclosed, he would quote poetry. Once he burst into song, but that was not a success. Nearly all Welsh people sing well, so it was fortunate

perhaps that we were at the time on a mountain road, and that I was the only auditor.

I contributed but little to the conversation, partly because I preferred to listen to Browne, partly because the roads in Wales are not all as level and safe as the London Mall, and partly because I could see that Browne's driving was entirely automatic. His hands and feet did the right thing at the right time, but his thought was disporting itself elsewhere. Therefore I had qualms, and when I have qualms I am generally silent and dubious. All went well, however, for the greater part of our run, and my qualms were gradually subsiding, when, rounding a bend in the road, we came suddenly on an elderly farmer plodding along in the direction we were going. We were not running very fast, but Browne, after sounding his horn, should have slowed down in order to give the man time to move from the centre of the road, for the road was narrow and there was a shallow ditch on the right-hand side. Browne's feet had done the proper thing automatically many times on our run, and they should have done the proper thing at this point, and not depended on Browne's thought, which was occupied elsewhere; for, as I have said, Browne was rioting in speech. I suspect that Browne's feet had become interested in what Browne was saying, just as his hands occasionally were, for this time instead of doing the right thing at the right time, the left foot remained inert while the right foot pressed the accelerator down hard. Instead of slowing down, the car gave a bound forward, and had not Browne's soaring thought

dropped instantly to the rescue, the result for the farmer might have been serious. As it was, in order to avoid the man, Browné swerved the car to the right and dropped his side of it into the ditch. It gave us a fearful jolt, but nobody was hurt except "Fifi." The jolt upset her internal arrangements, and "Fifi" fainted; the throb of her engine ceased.

Browne examined, diagnosed the case, and shook his head. It involved a major operation, and notwithstanding his six weeks' instruction, he did not feel capable. We interrogated the farmer as to our whereabouts. He had not quite recovered from his scare, and attempted to give us the information in the Welsh language, but gradually he became calmer and recalled his English, which had been frightened away. We made out that we were about five miles from Bettws-y-Coed, and that there was a garage there. Browne and I took counsel together. At first we thought of sending the farmer for assistance, but he was aged, and we decided that the probability of his getting assistance to us before nightfall was not great. We finally decided to walk on to Bettws-y-Coed, as we both felt disposed to stretch our legs, and the old farmer gladly agreed for a remuneration to keep an eye on the car until we returned.

As I said before, it was a hot day, and either Welsh miles are longer than other miles, or the farmer was out in his reckoning. We walked and talked. Then the talk ran out, and we just walked. The sun's rays beat fiercely down upon us, and the heat from the dusty road rose up to greet us. Now

and then the road wound through a shady wood or descended to the bank of a murmuring stream, and according to Browne, these oases on the desert trail were the only things that saved our lives.

When we had gone seven miles (Browne swore it was seven) we met an intelligent boy. In response to our inquiry he said Bettws-y-Coed was about two miles farther on, but if we liked we could make a short cut by taking a footpath across the fields and through some woods. He pointed out the path to us. We were grateful to the boy, and Browne gave him a shilling. That footpath probably was a short cut. The boy lived there and knew, and had no reason to deceive us. But he innocently forgot to tell us that after the footpath entered the wood, it ascended more or less steeply until it reached the top of a mountain one thousand feet high. (Browne swore it was that height and more!) Then it descended through what seemed to be the dry bed of a mountain stream where tangled bushes, mostly bramble, tried to impede our progress, and where myriads of flies claimed us as legitimate prey. And all the time the tireless sun poured heat down upon us in a manner which Browne said was sinfully wasteful.

I was better built physically for this sort of walking than Browne, but by the time we reached Bettws-y-Coed I had had enough and more. As for Browne, he sat down in the shady garden of the hotel and refused to move or speak for half an hour. After that he felt better, and we had tea. Then we went to the garage, but found that there was not a car in the place with which to go to the

rescue of "Fifi." The man at the garage was sympathetic. He said all he could do would be to borrow a horse and tow the car in, or if we would wait until the next day— But Browne said at once that he couldn't think of leaving the car and the old farmer out there all night, so a horse it must be. Then the man said he could not drive the horse and steer the car by himself, and he had no one to assist him. Browne looked at me and I looked at Browne. It meant five Welsh miles walk back to "Fifi" for one of us. I was doubtful about my ability to steer the car down that mountain road, but I was sorry for Browne, and offered at once to go. But Browne was a sport. He squared his shoulders and lit his pipe.

"Thanks awfully, old chap," he said; "but you go back to the hotel and engage rooms. I'm going for 'Fifi.' You couldn't steer a perambulator without assistance."

There was nothing more to be said. Browne started away with the man and the horse, and I went back to the hotel. It was then about five o'clock, and I calculated it would take three hours to reach "Fifi" and tow her back to the village. Therefore I ordered dinner for two to be served at eight o'clock. Knowing what Browne's appetite would be after his exertions, I got the waiter to prepare an extra sumptuous repast. Eight o'clock arrived, but no Browne. I got the waiter to postpone the serving of the dinner, and explained the reason for the delay. He, like the garage man, was sympathetic, and said that Browne should have a good dinner no matter what time he arrived. So

I waited, and although the pangs of hunger assailed me, I resolved not to eat until Browne returned. Nine o'clock, but no Browne. Again I sought the waiter, who told me that he had arranged with the cook to stay up and keep the food piping hot, and that I need not worry about Browne's dinner. He suggested that I should have my dinner then, but I told him it was a point of honour with me not to eat until my companion could join me. At ten o'clock I was decidedly anxious. I could not sit still. I went round to the garage. All was dark, no one was about. Rain began to fall. I returned to the hotel, found a book in the lounge, and tried to read. No good. Across the printed pages floated mental pictures of Browne and the horse and the garage-man struggling in the mud and darkness to drag "Fifi" from the ditch; or worse, of Browne and "Fifi" and the horse and the garage-man mixed in horrible confusion lying at the bottom of some dark ravine. At eleven o'clock I felt that I must do something. I would organize a relief-party. I asked the waiter the way to the police-station. He showed me the way, but said the station was locked up for the night.

"Where does the police force stay?" I asked.

He said it stayed in rooms over the station. It was a middle-aged man, and went to bed at ten o'clock, and was inclined to be irritable if disturbed. The waiter again urged me to have my dinner. Being wrought up mentally, I was about to say something nasty, when I heard a familiar footstep echoing in the silent street. It was Browne! Figuratively speaking, I fell on his neck and wept!

The waiter seized the two suit-cases Browne was carrying, and I hurried him up to his room. I helped him off with his mackintosh, and the chamber-maid brought hot water.

"Well, Jimmy," I said, when Browne appeared after his wash-up, "I *am* glad you got back safely! You must have had a deuce of a time. It has been over six hours since you left. I've been calling myself all sorts of names for not going back with you."

"Oh, that's all right, Shad; I haven't had such a bad time. In fact I've rather enjoyed it."

"What!" I exclaimed.

"Yes," continued Browne; "you see, the garage-man and I hadn't gone more than a hundred yards up the road before we came across a farm wagon going our way. The garage-man knew the farmer, we tied our horse behind, hopped on the wagon, and rattled away to 'Fifi.' We got her out of the ditch, and then the farmer invited us to go over to his house near-by and have dinner. We went, and I tell you, Shad, that dinner tasted good. After dinner we lit our pipes and yarned a bit, and really I didn't notice how late it was. Sorry you stayed up for me, old chap. 'Fifi' rolled along behind the horse as though she liked it. Got her over in the garage now. Oh, yes, the evening's experience wasn't half bad. And that dinner! I want to tell you what we had; all fresh, genuine country provender. I doubt if this hotel could do us as well. We had——"

"Wait, Jimmy," I interrupted. "Wait. I want to hear all about that farm-house dinner, but don't

tell it to me now. Save it until to-morrow. I've got to leave you now. I have an important matter to attend to at once."

"Have you?" said Browne.

"Yes," I replied. "I'm going to eat *my* dinner, two of them in fact!"

As time went on, Browne had many opportunities for country walking, for "Fifi" sulked or fainted on what seemed to be very slight provocation. "Fifi" grew old. Alas, that motor-cars should age so quickly! At an age when other animate creations are infantile or in the very early springtide of existence, these friends, to which one becomes peculiarly attached, begin to develop infirmities, and the grey hue of senile decay quickly dims their youthful freshness. Commenting on this point, Browne once said, "It is work that does it. Too much work and exercise, principally running. And it doesn't keep them fit, it just wears them out. No wonder the poor things are constantly tired!"

Beneficial as these compulsory country walks undoubtedly were to Browne, he always declined to admit it. He said there was a vast difference between voluntary and involuntary walking. He said to start out with pleasurable expectancy for a run in your car, and then be compelled to walk for miles and miles was not physically beneficial.

"You can't afford to ignore the mental equation," he would say.

However, "Fifi" sulked more and more as she grew older, and Browne was compelled, much to his disgust, to take unpremeditated exercise. I do not

mean to say that all his motoring was marred in this way, but the irritating part about it was its uncertainty. "Fifi" might be as good as gold for several runs, then one day in going up a hill which she had ascended easily the day before, "Fifi" would begin to groan and remonstrate, and the following mechanical dialogue would ensue :

"FIFI." Ma foi, monsieur, zis hill she is so steep ! I can it not do, non !

BROWNE [*replying with change of gear*]. Yes you can, old girl ! It's quite easy.

"FIFI" [*after a short distance*]. Non, monsieur, it is not possible ! Ze breath is gone from me out !

BROWNE [*replying with change to second speed*]. Buck up ! I'll help you.

"FIFI" [*after a short but desperate spurt*]. Help ! My head he swim, he go round and round !

BROWNE [*replying with more petrol and change to first speed*]. Have a drink, confound you ! And get a move on !

"FIFI" [*makes a last despairing effort and begins to slide backwards*]. Queek ! Hold me ! I fall ! I am keel !

BROWNE [*replying with hand-brake*]. Steady !— Now then, up you go !

"FIFI" [*trembling and groaning, tops the hill*]. Mon Dieu ! It iz cruel ! I am ze exhaust !

BROWNE [*replying with change to top speed*]. There, old girl, I knew you could do it. Get along !

"FIFI" [*faintly, after a few hundred yards*]. It iz too much ! My heart he break ! I am feenish !

[*Engine stops.*]

[*Browne gets down, and goes to work.*] Sometimes he succeeded in locating the trouble and applying the remedy. More often he took a walk in search of assistance.

The memory of "Fifi's" last run still lingers with me, and now that I come to write of it, I find a certain degree of sadness associated with the memory, for despite her shortcomings, I had grown fond of "Fifi," and I think Browne had also. When Browne bought the car, he inquired of the agent the purpose of a red cylindrical object strapped to the side of the tonneau.

"That's a fire-extinguisher," replied the agent.

"I have no intention of joining the fire brigade," said Browne.

"No," said the agent, laughing, "but you may find it useful."

Browne never found any use for it, but he left it on the car because every car he saw seemed to be equipped with one. He said its colour was decorative anyway.

I was with Browne on the occasion of "Fifi's" last run. We had not been out together for some little time, our run was a rather long one, and darkness overtook us when we were still twenty miles from London. "Fifi" had acted splendidly all day, and we were just congratulating ourselves over this fact when the throb of the engine grew feeble and ceased. It was very dark, we were in the midst of the country, and our oil head-lamps showed that we were at the top of a hill with a steep descent before us. With the aid of one of the

lamps, Browne tried to diagnose the trouble and coax "Fifi" into action, but failed. The road we were on was new to Browne, but we could see the lights in some cottage about a mile away. Browne did not feel that it would be safe to release the brake and attempt to steer the car down the steep decline without first reconnoitring. So Browne went off down the hill. I soon heard him shouting, and made out that he wanted me to fetch a lamp. I detached one of the side-lamps, and joined him. As the road was not a highway, and seemed to be unfrequented, we concluded that "Fifi" would be safe where she was, and we went on down the hill together. We found the road comparatively straight and good, and we soon reached the bottom of the hill. We decided, however, to go on to the cottage and ascertain what chance there was for procuring assistance, or of laying up the car for the night. The cottage proved to be more than a mile away, and some distance from the foot of the hill. Just before we reached the cottage we heard the sound of a car coming along the road behind us.

"Good," said Browne; "this chap will help us."

It was pleasing to think that one could always depend on help from a fellow-sufferer afflicted with automobilitis.

As the car came nearer, we could see by the advancing lights that it was running at a good pace. Browne stepped into the middle of the road, and swung his lamp from side to side. He also yelled vigorously. To our surprise, the driver did not slacken his pace nor pay any attention to

Browne's signals. The car passed us with a roar, and Browne had to sidestep pretty lively to avoid it.

"Confound the rotter!" cried Browne, "fancy him not stopping."

"Perhaps he didn't see us," I said.

"See us," said Browne, "of course he saw us! I'm glad there aren't many porkers like him on the road!"

Even as he spoke, there came the sound of a terrific crash. The passing car, instead of taking a bend in the road just beyond the cottage, had kept straight on, crossed the side of the road, and smashed into a garden wall!

"Heavens!" cried Browne, "the rotter must have been asleep!"

Browne started down the road on a run. I had never believed him capable of the speed he exhibited. I had great difficulty in keeping up with him. Before we had gone fifty yards, however, the ruins of the car burst into flame. The impact no doubt had smashed the petrol-tank, and the oil-lamps did the rest. When we reached the car, it was simply a roaring mass of smoke and fire. But we were not thinking of the car; we were horror-stricken as to the fate of its occupant or occupants. We made a hurried search about the road and then over the wall, but could find no bodies. We tried to get close enough to examine the ruins of the car, but the fierce heat and blinding smoke made it impossible. The people in the cottage, roused by the crash, quickly joined us, and we explained what had happened. Nothing could be done, we could only wait until the fire had exhausted itself. While

walking to and fro, just before the flames died down, my foot came in contact with something hidden in the grass by the roadside. I picked it up. It was a cylindrical object about eighteen inches long, and painted red. I called to Browne.

"A fire-extinguisher!" exclaimed Browne, when he saw what I had found.

Instinctively our eyes turned towards the glowing debris of the ruined car; then, with one thought dominant, we gazed up the dark road to where we had left "Fifi" sulking. It was a tense moment. Browne examined the extinguisher carefully. I finally broke the silence.

"You see, Jimmy, it isn't absolute proof. Nearly all cars are equipped with these things. I'll go back and make sure."

Browne gave a savage, ironical laugh in which, however, considerable relief could be detected.

"Save your legs, Shad," he said; "you'll need them."

He strode to the smouldering ruins from which flames still darted fitfully, took off his cap, and contemplated the wreckage for a few moments. Then he turned to the wondering cottagers, and inquired the shortest route to the nearest station.

We could never determine what caused poor "Fifi" to start on her mad run to destruction. Browne thought it possible that the car had been left too close to the brink of the hill, and the brake had given way, but he could not imagine how "Fifi" had managed to rush down that long stretch of road by herself, with no guiding hand on her steering-wheel.

I mentioned the mystery shrouding the occurrence to Jones at the Club one day. At first he was plainly incredulous, and said it was impossible for a motor-car to steer itself in that manner; but when I offered to take him round to Browne's garage and show him the fire-extinguisher in proof of my tale, he hedged. He said it might have been due to the action of centrifugal force combined, I think he said, with capillary attraction. That may have been the explanation, but Browne, for some reason, would never accept Jones's theory.

And now, sure enough, I find that the circuitous thought-current has brought us again to the point where we left Browne in my easy chair, laughing reminiscently.

"However," I said, "you can't charge your present car with occasioning you any unpremeditated walking. Even when it lapses from good behaviour, it is your chauffeur who works or walks, and not you. No, Jimmy, if you want me to take your case, my first professional advice is—leg exercise."

"Right oh!" said Browne. "I'll walk from here to my office."

"That's good, but it isn't enough. What you need is a systematic course of country walking. That reminds me—you can have a first dose this afternoon, if you will. Helen discovered yesterday that I had not—er—taken my pedestrian medicine as regularly as I ought to have done since she has been away at school, so she has prescribed a walk for me this afternoon. We leave Baker Street station at one o'clock for some unknown destination, from which she says our walk will begin.

She says she has planned a lovely walk. Join us, Jimmy."

Browne's face fell when I mentioned Helen, and he suddenly remembered that he had to sign some important papers that afternoon. However, by degrees I managed to coax him round.

"Very well," said Browne, "I'll run up to the office now and sign those papers. Then I'll go back to my flat, change my clothes, and meet you at Baker Street at one o'clock. But I say, Shad, you need not mention to Helen that I am taking this walk for — er — anything but — er — pleasure, you know."

"Certainly not, Jimmy," I said.

Then Browne ran up to his office. Jarvis helped him to run—with a cab-whistle.

CHAPTER XI

BROWNE joined us at Baker Street station as he promised. Helen and I met on the platform, and we had just exchanged greetings when I saw Browne coming down the stairway. I do not know just what kind of a walk Browne expected to take, but he explained later that he thought it well to be prepared for emergencies. Helen and I were attired as usual in serviceable summer suits, with stout boots, and we carried sticks and light macintoshes. My hat was of straw, for it was mid-July and the weather was hot.

Browne's "get-up" was remarkable to say the least. He wore a very rough Harris tweed knickerbocker suit, the more or less blended colours of which were many and vivid. I was not aware that his wardrobe boasted such a suit, and I wondered where, and for what purpose, he had ever bought it. Under the coat he wore an athlete's sweater with a collar which rolled close under his chin. On his head was a slouch hat with brim turned down all around, and on his feet were heavy brown boots with nails in the soles. He carried a macintosh over his left arm, a crook-handled stick was in his right hand, and a pair of field-glasses swung at his side from a strap across his chest. In addition to all this, he carried on his back that well-known carry-

all of the Alpine climber, a rucksack. This last appendage caused me much surprise until I remembered suddenly that Browne and I had spent a few weeks in Switzerland together several years before. While there, Browne, impressed by the adventurous activity of so many young men, evinced an inclination to emulate them. After careful thought, and much study of various guide-books, he announced that, as a beginning, we would walk from Meiringen over the Grimsel Pass to the Rhone Glacier, and then by the Furka Pass to Brigue. We accordingly prepared for the journey, and, like other energetic trampers, we each carried a rucksack.

I will not describe our Alpine walk. It took us five days to do it, but we laid up one day at the Rhone Glacier Hotel. When we arrived at Brigue on the evening of the fifth day, we sought the hotel, and Browne immediately retired to bed. He said he didn't want anything to eat, he didn't want anything to drink, he didn't want to talk, he didn't even want to smoke; he just wanted to lie down, close his eyes, and think of smooth, green lawns and easy chairs.

When planning our walking tour at Meiringen, Browne said that after arriving at Brigue we would be well broken in to tramping, and our next walk would be over the Simplon Pass to sunny Italy. On the morning following our arrival at Brigue, Browne came down to breakfast rather late.

"A beautiful day for our tramp over the Simplon," I said.

"Is it?" said Browne listlessly. "If you don't mind, Shad, we will take a shorter walk to-day; about a hundred yards to the station. I've heard



Browne's "get-up" was remarkable to say the least

that the scenery in the Rhone Valley is far superior to the Simplon. Let us take the train to Lausanne. I don't feel equal to the Simplon ; a hundred yards is about my limit to-day."

"But," I argued, "you said at Meiringen that by the time we reached Brigue we would be well broken in."

"Did I say that ?" asked Browne gloomily. "I should have said 'up,' Shad, 'up,' instead of 'in.' " Then he added more brightly, "I'm glad, however, that I have done the walk. It has passed into the place reserved for foolish things finished, and I am certain a merciful Providence will never allow me to do such a thing again !"

Therefore, Browne had no further need for his rucksack in Switzerland, but I presume he brought it home with him as a souvenir to remind him of his thrilling experience.

When Helen saw Browne coming down the stairway, she gave a convulsive giggle, then became chillingly sombre.

"Do you mean to say, Shad, that that man is going with us ?"

"Why, yes, Helen ; I invited him to join us. I thought he ought to have more exer—er, that is, I mean to say, he was delighted at the opportunity of giving us the pleasure of his company. He has, er—quite overlooked what happened yesterday, and if I were you, Helen, I wouldn't—er—recall past events which—er— Good morning, Jimmy ; well, here we are ! I was just telling Helen you were going with us, and she said, er— Hadn't we better be getting into the train ? It starts in two minutes."

Having thus restored amenities to the best of my feeble ability, I hurried to a train standing at the platform, and got into an empty compartment. However, I was coldly recalled by Helen, who informed me that our train had not yet come in. We had only five minutes to wait, but it seemed much longer to me. Helen and Browne had exchanged perfunctory greetings, and Browne had given his opinion about the weather, but otherwise conversationally there was nothing doing. Helen seemed to adopt the pose of passive resistance, and gave her attention to terrier "Jimmy," whom I had brought with me. I tried to make conversation that would include the three of us, but Helen only answered when absolutely necessary, although Browne was a trifle better. I essayed to be merry, and even joked Browne about his rucksack. It was then that Browne said, "I did not know what sort of a walk Helen had planned, so I thought it well to be prepared for emergencies."

Helen said, "It was very thoughtless of you, Shad, to have forgotten the other things."

"What other things?" I asked.

"The ice-axes and the rope," replied Helen.

At that moment, our train pulled in, and as we rushed to find an empty compartment, I had only time to note that the expression on Browne's face was not a happy one, and that Helen was repressing a giggle which threatened to burst bounds. We found an empty compartment, but at that moment I would have preferred a crowded one, for the prospect of being alone with Helen and Browne was not pleasing. The five minutes' conversation-making

had tired me mentally. Fortunately, however, Helen, having shot her little barbed jest, now seemed disposed to make the best of the situation. She became quite cheerful and talkative, and under the influence of the changed conditions, Browne's unhappy expression rapidly faded away. Helen gave us an outline of our proposed tramp. Part of it was familiar to me, and part of it was undiscovered country to both Helen and me.

Several years have elapsed since that country walk, but if I recollect rightly, our route was to be as follows : Leaving the railway at a station called Chorley Wood, we were to follow a road leading to the village of Chenies ; then, taking to a footpath through the top of the woods skirting the banks of the river Chess, descend to the Chess near Latimer House, and follow the main road until we reached the foot of Ley Hill. All this was well-known territory to Helen and me, but our route from the foot of Ley Hill was to run through the unknown. Helen said from that point she would rely on a little pamphlet she possessed, called "Country Walks." This was a new departure for Helen, as hitherto she and I had found it more enjoyable to venture into unknown territory without a guide-book, trusting to our instinct for direction and occasional inquiries of country people to bring us into touch again with a pair of those steel apron-strings which old Mother London is for ever dangling out into the country wilds to guide her children home.

We soon reached Chorley Wood station, and started off at once on the road to Chenies. Despite the heat, it was a lovely day. Snowy billows of

summer clouds floated lazily in a sky of exquisite blue. The song of the larks high above the green meadows and fields of ripening grain came faintly to our ears. It was a day especially made for one who desired to sit in the shade of an old tree, look abroad over the pleasant landscape, and just do nothing. I felt, indeed, that the day was made for me. But Helen had no idea of letting us sit in the shade. She set a good pace, and we perforce had to follow. I was surprised at the way Browne took to the road. For a man unaccustomed to walking, as I knew him to be, and encumbered with the outfit he carried, his performance was really wonderful. Occasionally, he would pause to adjust his rucksack or to call our attention to some beauty of the rural scene, and while doing so, he would wipe the perspiration from his brow. But Helen would pause only a moment. I never knew her to be quite so energetic before. Gradually it dawned upon me that she was setting the pace for a purpose. She was trying to wear Browne out. I think Browne soon noticed it also. When, after a moment's pause, such as I have mentioned, Helen would say, "Well, let's get on," Browne's jaw seemed to set with grim determination, and once in a while he himself would forge to the front, and set the pace. It was developing into a test of endurance between the two.

In time we came to the little village of Chenies, and there beneath the old trees in the quiet square, I exerted a brotherly authority, and called a halt.

"The sun is hot, the road is long," I said. "Let

us pause and contemplate this Drury Lane setting of 'Ye Olde Country Village.' "

"Charming!" exclaimed Browne, -mopping his forehead. "The resemblance is perfect. It is the first night of the Pantomime. The chorus are only waiting their cue to trip on in their bucolical costumes. See the open gate of yon manor house! The leading lady with the top note will appear in a moment, the bells in yonder church will peal; for is not this the day that Archibald returns to claim his bride?"

"It is!" I said. "We must not miss the opening chorus. Let us take our seats." Browne and I sat down on the grass.

"Programmes, twopence! Chocklits! Ices!" cried Helen, laughing. "You are quitters, both of you! I'll give you five minutes, then we take to the woods!"

And it was so. The walk through the woods was delightful, and even Helen seemed loath to hurry here. The hot glare of the sunshine outside was tempered here to a cool dimness. The smooth, straight trunks of towering beeches, soft-tinted green with nature's brush, made pillared avenues through which it were sacrilege to hurry. It was a place to loiter, to contemplate, to dream, to pat the smooth or rugged cheeks of friendly trees, to breathe deep breaths of air spiced and perfumed by the woodland's alchemy. At one point we came upon a tiny glade carpeted and canopied with the tenderest green of grass and foliage.

"If woodland fairies dance on moonlit nights, this surely is their place of meeting," said Browne.

"If!" said Helen; "why 'if'? Of course they do! For what other purpose was this little dream-spot created? Not for us clumsy mortals. Let us call it 'Titania's Glade'!"

Thus we named it, and went on our way. Once, through an opening in the woods, I could see a road white as snow under the sun-glare, winding away in the distance until it disappeared over the top of a hill. Then was I reminded of a little picture an artist friend had once painted for me, the picture of a country road, ribboned white between green meadows, rising gradually until it met the skyline at the top of a hill, and was lost to view. He called it "Over the Hill."

*Oh, the top of the Hill was the rim of the world,
And the dust of the summer that over it curled
Was the curtain that hid from our sight the abode
Of the fairies that lived up the old country road.*

JAMES NEWTON MATTHEWS.

As a child, from the nursery window of my father's place I could see just such a road; and I grew to love in a fearful sort of way the mystery with which my childish fancy endowed it. People and horses and vehicles went up the road and over the hill, and disappeared. Flocks of sheep and droves of cattle went slowly up the ascent, were silhouetted against the sky, and then vanished. I came to call it the "dropping-off place," and I pictured in thought the wonderful and terrible countries into which they had dropped, countries outlined and peopled largely from nursery tales. One day, tightly clasping my father's hand, I walked up the

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old road to the top of the hill. The mystery was solved! There was no "dropping-off place." The road continued in gentle descent winding away into the distance. At first I was disappointed, just as in after life the too prosaic solution of self-made illusions brought with it a certain degree of disappointment, but the sense of relief quickly banished the disappointment. I had never really loved the "dropping-off place"; it was only the mystery connected with it that had fascinated me. I was glad the road went on and on.

Some years have passed since my friend, the artist, went "over the hill" and disappeared; yet, who can claim that the road ended at the top, and beyond was only the abyss of nothingness? Rather would I think that he found the road continued, a pleasant road whereon he met congenial fellow-travellers, and was not lonely.

So, Helen and Browne and I sauntered through the woods, preceded by "Jimmy," who sauntered not, until at last we descended to the banks of the Chess, and came again into the dusty main road.

"Now," said Helen, "it is two miles to Ley Hill. Best foot forward! *Allons!*"

"*Allons* it is!" cried Browne, adjusting his outfit.

It was only two miles to Ley Hill; Helen's guide-book said so. But after we had tramped a long, long way, Browne said that the author of the guide-book must have measured the distance on a cool and cloudy day, and he would like to wager that the measuring was done from the seat of a comfortable motor-car. Distance, he said, may "lend enchant-

ment to the view," but not to the view of that road ! He said he had seen enough of that road to last him a life-time, and he was not enchanted. Once, when a motor-car sped swiftly by and presented us with a part of the road, which we dutifully inhaled and swallowed, Browne said (as soon as he could speak), " Those rotters are probably admiring this beautiful road ! I used to be like that in a car, but I know better now. You've got to *walk* on a road to know it. Nearness to the road lends ugliness to the view, dust to the lungs, and perspiration to the brow ! "

" But think, Jimmy," I said, " the good it is doing you." Helen was some distance ahead, and did not hear our conversation.

" I am trying to think that, Doctor Shad," replied Browne, " but just now your dose is like a sugar-coated pill turned inside out."

However, by patient plodding, we finally reached the foot of Ley Hill and found Helen awaiting us on the little bridge spanning the Chess. She was dreamily contemplating the tiny stream as it wound its way through the meadows.

" I wonder," she said, " why they call the Chess a river. It's much too big a name for it. It's only a dear little baby streamlet. Rivers are grown-ups."

" Quite so," said Browne, unshipping his rucksack and seating himself on the parapet of the bridge. " Quite so. But then, you see the Chess grows up farther along."

" Does it ? " asked Helen.

" Doesn't it ? " asked Browne, appealing to me.

" Er, I believe so," I answered. " At school, you know, we were taught that the mouth of a river is

always larger than its head. Curious, when you come to think of it, how the mouth of anything could be larger than its head, but so we were taught at school. At any rate, I left school with that impression. Speaking about rivers, do you remember old Jorkins, the head master, asking the class one day why there was more water in the Thames at London Bridge than there was at Windsor? And wasn't it you, Jimmy, who said it was because they were stingy with the water at Windsor and kept it locked up?"

"No," replied Browne, lighting his pipe; "it wasn't me, it was Smithers who said it, but old Jorkins was short-sighted and thought it was me. He said he was positive he saw my lips moving. As a matter of fact, they were. I was eating toffee. Dear old Jorkins! It used to give him peculiar delight to discover Browne as the culprit. I think I managed to collect more punishment than any of the boys, and——"

"Being more of you," interrupted Helen, gravely studying her guide-book. Then, before Browne could reply, she said brightly, "Is this a country walk, or is it an annual reunion of the 'Old Boys'? Come! The village of Chesham is our objective. According to the guide-book, we must first climb to the top of Ley Hill, cross a stile on the left side of the lane, take a footpath across the fields, then——"

"But," interrupted Browne, "why not continue along this road? It leads direct to Chesham, according to the sign-post."

"Of course," said Helen scornfully, "if you want to go to Chesham!"

"I thought you said that was the object of our walk."

"The object of our walk is not the objective point. The object of our walk is the walk."

"Oh!" said Browne, "that makes the point clear. It is the pursuit and not the possession which we are to enjoy."

"Quite so," said Helen.

"And the longer the pursuit, the greater our enjoyment," said Browne.

"Exactly," said Helen.

"I quite understand," said Browne, resuming his rucksack. "Let us then forthwith pursue."

We started up Ley Hill. The lane was narrow, the road was rough, the hedges were high, the scenery was hid, the hill was steep, the sun was hot, the flies were friendly, but nothing else disturbed our enjoyment. When we reached the top, Browne said that, measuring his enjoyment by the pursuit, he had never enjoyed anything so much in his life before.

Helen and "Jimmy" reached the top first, and when Browne and I arrived, we found Helen sitting on a stile deeply engrossed in her guide-book.

"This seems to be the stile," she said, looking up, "but where is the footpath across the fields?"

Browne and I took a look at the fields.

"Judging," said Browne, "from the luxuriant growth of the wheat, I should say that the footpath is about three feet under the top."

"But we can't walk through the wheat!" cried Helen in dismay.

"We can," said Browne; "but if the farmer

lives beyond the field, he will not be pleased to see us 'comin' thro' the rye' ! "

" That's the bother with these country-walk guide-books," said Helen in disgust ; " if one link in the chain of direction misses fire, where are we ! "

" Might just as well fire off the other links and go home," said Browne.

" But we are not going home ! " cried Helen, jumping down from the stile. " We are going to Chesham ! And not by any dinky old main road either. I shall find a way. Shad and I have often done it. We have an instinct for direction, haven't we, Shad ? "

I modestly admitted it, but explained to Browne that personally whenever my instinct for direction came into conflict with a statement on a sign-post, my instinct instantly gave way. Helen sometimes argued with a sign-post, but my convictions were never strong enough for that.

After giving her instinct for direction a few moments to pull itself together, Helen announced that we would go forward, descend the other side of Ley Hill, and work gradually round to the left, in which direction Chesham was supposed to be. As I said before, several years have passed since we took this country walk, but that is not the only reason why I cannot now remember the route we followed. Had I returned to the top of Ley Hill the following day, and attempted to go over the same route again, I fear I should have gone astray, though perhaps not so much astray as we went the day before.

Helen led and we followed. We went down-

hill, then we went up-hill. We crossed stiles and followed winding footpaths. We opened barred gates which were unlocked, and climbed others which were locked. We followed promising trails which led us into farmyards, and then we retreated. We followed other trails which led us into ploughed fields, and then vanished. We hopefully plunged into shady woodland paths only to be confronted with a notice that the woods were private and prosecution for trespassing was imminent. Once in a while we would stumble upon a main road, but never a sign-post to tell us whether to go to the right or the left, so we always went to the left. Helen was hopeful. She said we were gradually working round towards Chesham. I was not so hopeful and I was tired, but I said nothing to discourage her. Browne was hopeful, even cheerful. He said, "It's a small island; we are sure to reach the coast at some point."

Helen glared at him; she made no reply, but I could see by the expression on her face that from thenceforward her instinct for direction would be worked to the limit. Her pride was wounded. I fancy she resolved at that moment to guide Browne into Chesham or kill him in the attempt. We went on and on. My instinct for direction had long ago given up the struggle and collapsed. I was of no use practically. Once in a while, I suggested to Helen the advisability of inquiring at a farm-house or of wayfarers whom we occasionally met, but Helen disdained the suggestions. She said she was not lost if we were.

It was after six o'clock when several dark clouds,

which had for some time been hovering in the western sky, suddenly discerned three weary, dusty pedestrians accompanied by an unwearied fox-terrier, plodding along an endless lane. The three pedestrians limped. Helen had twisted her ankle,



Suddenly discerned three weary, dusty pedestrians accompanied by an unwearied fox-terrier, plodding along an endless lane

Browne's heavy, hob-nailed boots were chafing his feet, and I had barked my shin in climbing a gate. It was a sad spectacle. The clouds rushed towards us. They gathered above us, and, unable to restrain their emotional sympathy, they wept over us—copiously. We fled for shelter to an adjacent wood. We climbed a locked gate. There was the usual sign threatening us as trespassers, but we cared not. The trees afforded partial shelter, but the temperature fell rapidly. It was soon apparent that the down-pour was not a simple shower. It had settled into a steady rain. We shivered and debated. Helen was certain that this lane would take us into a main road

close to Chesham. I had doubts, and Browne was clearly sceptical.

"At any rate," he said, "let us wait a bit. Perhaps the deluge will abate to an ordinary rain. And in the meantime, suppose we have some tea."

"By all means," said Helen, with biting sarcasm, "let us suppose! Press the button, please. I'll have a slice of lemon in mine, and don't forget the caviare sandwiches."

Browne grinned but said nothing. He unshipped his rucksack and became a conjurer. From the depths of that carry-all he brought forth a flat kettle and a spirit-lamp. He plunged his hand in again, and brought forth a waterproof cloth which he spread on the pine-needles under a tree. Then, out of the rucksack came little parcels in waxed paper which when opened disclosed thin bread and butter, sandwiches, and cake. Next appeared three aluminium cups and saucers, spoons, a teapot, paper plates, sugar, a small bottle of milk, and a pot of jam. He arranged them all on the waterproof cloth before our astonished eyes.

"Higgins thought I had better be prepared for emergencies," said Browne, still grinning.

Helen eyed the food ravenously, but said, with triumphant scorn, "Higgins evidently forgot that water has something to do with tea-making."

"No," said Browne, "Higgins did not forget. He told me that water could be obtained anywhere."

"Here, for instance!" said Helen. "Shall I hold the kettle under the deluge?"

"No," said Browne. "I think we can do better than that." He took the kettle and disappeared

down a path leading into the depths of the woods. In a few minutes he returned with the kettle filled with water. "Found a spring," he explained.

Despite the lapse of time since that rain-drenched, woodland tea-party, I can still remember the intense satisfaction with which I tackled the hot tea and sandwiches. It seems to me even now that nothing before or since has tasted so good. I cannot speak for Helen and Browne, but judging from the way they sampled Higgins's provender, I should say the memory of it must still linger with them also. It was a small matter that the milk had soured. The tea was hot, and three times Browne refilled the kettle at the spring before we cried enough. By the time we had finished our tea, the rain had somewhat abated. Browne quickly repacked his rucksack. Helen, refreshed but limping and somewhat bedraggled, again took the lead and started for the lane.

"Wait a moment," said Browne; "I don't believe that lane goes in the right direction."

"Are you developing an instinct for direction?" asked Helen coldly.

"I am," replied Browne firmly; "and if you don't mind, Helen, I would like to give my instinct a chance for a while."

"As you please," said Helen; "we have all the night before us."

"Thank you," said Browne. "Now, I propose to take this path through the woods. I believe it will lead us to where we want to go."

Helen made no reply. Browne took the lead, and we followed. It was getting dark, but we soon traversed the woods and came out into a field.

Browne limped across the field, and we limped after him. He opened a gate on the far side, and we found ourselves in a narrow lane between high hedges. Browne turned to the left, and for the next half-hour we trudged through the mud of that interminable lane, while the rain turned Helen's summer hat into a weird and shapeless mass. It was pitch dark when we reached a main road, and there, to our joy, we discerned a sign-post. With the aid of numerous matches, we read the lettering. It said, "Chalfont Road, $\frac{1}{2}$ mile; Chesham, 2 miles." The Chalfont Road arm pointed to the left, the Chesham arm to the right.

I do not propose to relate in detail the discussion which followed. Browne and I voted for Chalfont Road; Helen declared emphatically for Chesham. She said our objective was Chesham, and to Chesham she proposed to go. We argued with her, but it had no effect. She again denounced us as quitters and said she would go to Chesham alone. She started off on the road to the right. Browne and I looked at each other, then Browne went after Helen, caught up with her, and I heard him say, "Helen, the majority always rules. You are going with us to Chalfont Road if I—er—have to carry you!"

Whether the tone of Browne's voice tamed her, or whether she really had no intention of going to Chesham, or whether the twinges in her ankle gave the decision, I do not know; but Helen slowly turned and went with us towards Chalfont Road. Silently we plodded along, but when we were about a hundred yards from the little wayside station, Helen gave a soft cry and sank limply into

the mud. I lifted her up and found she had fainted. I carried her for a few yards, but my strength giving way, I gladly handed my burden over to Browne, who, much perturbed, hurried with her towards the station. Helen regained consciousness before we reached the station, and finding herself in Browne's arms, indignantly demanded to be set down, but Browne refused the demand, and finally deposited a wet, muddy, and dishevelled Helen on a seat in the station waiting-room. The station-master and porters were not surprised. They were used to country walkers at that station.

At ten o'clock that night Browne and I sat in snug comfort in his flat in Kensington. We had seen Helen and "Jimmy" safely into the alarmed but relieved embrace of Aunt Lorina, and at Browne's pressing invitation I had gone with him to his flat. If Higgins had any natural curiosity as to the cause of our disreputable appearance, he did not betray it. He dried, warmed, and fed us in his usual imperturbable manner. Now we sat in easy chairs, with slippered feet on the fender before a cheerful fire, for the night was chilly, while the incense of our cigars floated lazily about us.

"Jimmy," I said, "I'm puzzled about that spring in the woods where you got the water for the tea. You seemed to know where it was."

"I ought to," said Browne. "I own the woods."

"You own them!"

"Yes; inherited them from an uncle. Also several score acres about there."

"That possibly explains the instinct for direction which you exhibited."

"Quite so," said Browne. "I know all that country from Ley Hill to Chesham like a guide-book."

"And you let Helen lead us in our tangled course!"

"When a lady wills—*que voulez-vous?* But don't tell Helen," said Browne, chuckling.

"Trust me!" I said.

It was midnight when I reached my chambers and retired to a well-earned rest. Browne also retired to a well-earned rest, but he failed to get it, for this was the night on which the events narrated in the first chapter occurred.

There, at last we have drifted round to Browne's lost idea. I knew we should sooner or later.

CHAPTER XII

BROWNE was fond of his valet, Higgins, and Higgins was intensely devoted to Browne. The old saying, "No man is a hero to his own valet," was not proven true in the case of Browne and Higgins. By some mysterious mental process Higgins endowed his master with qualities heroic. I do not know why. Browne had never done anything particularly heroic. He said himself that he laid no claim to heroism, mental or physical, and he imagined that no one else had ever made such a claim for him. He said he felt that Higgins was endowing him with qualities which took a lot of "living up" to.

"If the hand of Fame," said Browne to me one day, "ever really encircles my brow with the laurel wreath of heroism, I am certain Higgins will keep that wreath well dusted, and will insist on my wearing it in public and private. Higgins is built that way."

Higgins was a single man, and devotion was one of his strong characteristics. Having no other object upon which to lavish his devotion, he expended it on Browne. Having invested his master with heroic qualities, Higgins in time developed a sense of responsibility in regard to Browne, which Browne said was flattering but at times embarrassing. Not that Higgins was ever obtrusive in his

devotion. He was at all times the respectful, obedient servant; but he evidently felt that Browne was a man whom the world could ill afford to lose. Higgins spoke but little, and what transpired in the mentality behind that calm, expressionless countenance, only Higgins knew. His devotion to Browne was expressed in little acts which, for the most part, lay outside his professional duties.

On one occasion, when Browne was laid up with a mild attack of influenza, Higgins was told by the physician to take Browne's temperature at intervals, and was instructed in the use of a clinical thermometer for that purpose. Thereafter, Higgins and a clinical thermometer were inseparable. Armed with this little instrument, Higgins stood sentinel at the door of Browne's physical well-being. He reasoned that Browne's health was a matter of degrees of temperature, and at the slightest sign of any physical disorder, Higgins used his thermometer, openly, if Browne would allow it, surreptitiously if he objected. A degree or two above normal caused Higgins anxiety; more, generally sent him to the telephone. Browne said whenever Higgins took his temperature, he, Browne, could always tell approximately his registered heat without looking at the thermometer. If Higgins just moved about the room arranging things and glanced at him occasionally, he knew his temperature was only a degree or two above normal. But if Higgins looked at the thermometer and then moved quietly but swiftly towards the door, he knew his temperature was more than two degrees above normal, and he had to act quickly if he did not desire a visit from the doctor, for Higgins was bound

for the telephone. Sometimes Higgins used strategy when Browne was not feeling well, but refused to submit to the ever-ready thermometer. He took Browne's temperature after he had fallen asleep. More than once, Browne had awakened to find his pulse throbbing against the professional thumb, while Higgins hovered anxiously in the background. Browne used to rebuke Higgins for his overanxiety, but Higgins could not be persuaded by mere rebuke to forsake his watchfulness. On one night, however, matters reached a climax.

It was a winter night. A freezing, sleety blizzard was sweeping through the London streets. The pavements were inches deep in the grimy slush which answers to the name of snow in London. Browne had an intention of going to the theatre that evening, but after taking a look at the weather, he wisely called for his dressing-gown and slippers. Besides, he had a headache. He mentioned the fact to Higgins, and said he thought he would read a while and then turn in. So Higgins saw that Browne was comfortably settled in his easy chair in front of a cheerful fire, with his reading-lamp by his side. Browne read, smoked, and dozed for an hour or two, and then went to bed. He was restless, and some time elapsed before he could get to sleep. Finally, he glided away into dreamland and became involved in a mixed lot of marvellous adventures. Suddenly he jumped back into awakeland and found himself sitting upright in bed with the end of Higgins's thermometer protruding from the side of his mouth. Higgins had just left the room, and was softly closing the door behind him. Browne knew he

would be back in a few minutes to read the thermometer. An amusing idea occurred to Browne. He removed the thermometer from his mouth, struck a match, and held the flame close to the bulb of the instrument. He ran the indicator up to a point never yet attained by human temperature, and then, just as he heard Higgins opening the door, he popped the thermometer into his mouth again and lay down. Higgins came softly to the bedside, gently removed the thermometer from Browne's mouth, and read the record. Browne said he heard Higgins give a gasp. He opened his eyes, and when he saw the alarmed look on Higgins's face, he could not repress a gigantic laugh which was struggling for utterance.

The effect of the laugh on Higgins was surprising. He evidently made a rapid mental calculation. Blood-boiling temperature plus laughter—result, delirium! Higgins jumped to this conclusion and then for the door! Browne, still laughing, attempted to leap out of bed, got tangled in the bedclothes, fell out instead, and narrowly missed crushing Ajax, who had come from under the bed. Ajax thought it was a new game and laughed in sympathy. Browne said the combination of laughs certainly did sound delirious. Before he could untangle himself from the bedclothes, Higgins had reached the door, slipped out the key, left the room



Higgins came softly to the bedside, gently removed the thermometer from Browne's mouth, and read the record. Higgins gave a gasp.

and locked the door behind him. The next moment Browne heard him roaring into the telephone in a most un-Higgins-like manner. Clearly, for the moment, Higgins had lost his mental poise !

Browne banged on the door, and ordered Higgins away from the 'phone, but that faithful servitor glued his ear to the receiver and his mouth to the transmitter until he had convinced an incredulous doctor in Harley Street that Browne was in a state of mental and physical conflagration. Then he came back to Browne's door, and respectfully bade him be calm, as the doctor would soon be there. Browne was calm. Never calmer in his life, he said. He tried to convince Higgins of this fact, and punctuated his remarks with thumps on the closed door. Ajax also added his voice to the controversy, and, as Higgins told me afterwards, it was difficult to say which voice predominated, Ajax' or his master's. After a while, Browne heard Higgins at the 'phone again ; then all was silent, that is, all but Ajax and himself. Being convinced shortly of the uselessness of bruising his knuckles against the door, the funny side of the affair presented itself to Browne.

He calmed Ajax, donned his dressing-gown, and awaited the arrival of the doctor. An hour elapsed before he arrived. The cab which his servant had secured after an exhausting performance on an unmusical whistle, broke down when still a half-mile from Browne's flat, and the doctor had to walk the remaining distance. He was not in a pleasant frame of mind when he arrived. I have already mentioned the weather. The doctor mentioned it several times before his interview with Browne and

Higgins was finished. Browne explained his little joke on Higgins, and laughed heartily. The doctor did not laugh. He said that one of his friends was a celebrated brain specialist. He said he would send him round to see Browne in the morning. And, he said, it might be a good idea to let the specialist have a glance at Higgins's mental interior also.

Browne worked hard to convince the doctor that there was a funny side to the affair, but it was not until Higgins had built a cosy fire in the drawing-room, and had got them seated before it in comfortable chairs, with solid, liquid, and nicotine refreshments close at hand, that the doctor became cheerful and laughed.

"Well," he said, "I suppose I ought not to complain. If it wasn't for people like you and Higgins, Harley Street houses would long ago have joined the ranks of those that cater for the guest who promises to pay. It is money and fear that keep us going!"

About this time, Browne's door-bell began to ring, and it rang at intervals up to midnight. Each ring betokened the arrival of a relative or friend more or less alarmed. Higgins had been busy with the 'phone while waiting for the doctor. Each relative and friend expressed his relief that it was a false alarm. Then each expressed his opinion of the weather and Higgins. It was not a pleasant evening for Higgins, but he tried to atone by making the guests as comfortable as possible. It became quite a merry little evening. Browne said he never felt better. His headache vanished, and only came back the next morning when he awoke. He couldn't think why.

I was not among the merry guests that evening, not being blessed with a telephone at that period. But Higgins sent me a telegram. It did not arrive until the next morning as I sat at breakfast. It curtailed my breakfast and spoiled my appetite, and took me over to Browne's flat as quickly as the promise of double pay to a cabman could take me. Browne was not glad to see me. He said there would be other arrivals during the day, as Higgins had not forgotten some out-of-town relatives when he sent telegrams. He said devotion ceased to be devotion when it became anxiety, and, he said, a joke ceased to be a joke when it became a damned nuisance. He said he had destroyed Higgins's clinical thermometer, and had threatened him with dire and dreadful things if he so much as mentioned temperature again. But these trivial events did not lessen Higgins's sense of devotion and responsibility towards Browne.

On the morning after our country walk, described in the previous chapter, I was sitting at a very late breakfast. I had risen early, and after a cup of tea, had hurried off to Aunt Lorina's house in Chelsea, only to be assured by her that Helen was none the worse for her country walk. She was sleeping peacefully, and her ankle was not seriously sprained. So, much relieved, I hurried back to my breakfast. I had just finished, when Jarvis came in to tell me that Browne's man would like to see me for a few minutes. When Higgins entered, he was outwardly calm, but his words soon betrayed considerable inward agitation.

He proceeded to tell me what had occurred at

Browne's flat the night before, events which I have faithfully recorded in Chapter I. Whether my mental power for grasping details was weak that morning, or whether Higgins's narrative was confused, I know not. I only know that I got the impression at first that Browne's flat on the previous night had been the scene of a fire, an attempt at burglary, a broken water-main, and a fight in which Browne, Higgins, Ajax, the fireman, and the Police-Inspector were mixed up like the characters in a French farce. I gathered that Higgins had, in some remarkable way, saved Browne from arrest or drowning, I couldn't tell which. A few points, however, stood out clearly ; they were, that Browne's flat would be uninhabitable for a week or two, that Browne had gone to his office, and that Higgins had just taken his clothes over to the Club where Browne would reside for the present. But Higgins had not come merely to narrate to me the events of the previous night. He was worried about Browne. And herein is seen the sense of personal responsibility which characterized Higgins's devotion to his master.

"If I may say so, sir, Mr. Browne is not at all 'imself this morning," continued Higgins.

"I should imagine not, if all you tell me is true," I said. "He must have had an exciting time last night."

"Yes, sir, it was fairly exciting, but I don't think it was that what upset him. 'E was eating his breakfast as calm as yourself, sir, when all of a sudden 'e gets up from the table and starts walking up and down a-muttering to 'imself. 'Lost!' I heard

'im say, 'Lost!' I asks 'im could I find anything for 'im, but 'e only looks at me vacant-like, and then goes into the bedroom, which, if you will believe me, sir, is in a 'orrible mess. 'E looks about, then comes out and walks up and down the 'all a-holding his 'and to his 'ead. Then 'e sits down in the drawing-room, but instead of reading the morning papers, 'e just stares at nothing."

"Nerve shock," I diagnosed, in quite a Harley Street manner.

"Yes, sir," agreed Higgins, who would have agreed had I diagnosed lumbago or measles instead.

"You say Mr. Browne has gone to his office?" I asked.

"Yes, sir. The people at the office kept telephoning, and I kept reporting to 'im, but 'e just waved me away and paid no attention to the calls. 'Owever, about ten o'clock, 'e gives a big sigh, tells me to bring his coat and 'at. Just before starting, 'e looks at me steady for a moment, then says, 'Higgins, did you ever lose anything?' 'Yes, sir,' I says. 'E keeps looking at me a while, then shakes his 'ead and says, 'It's 'ell, isn't it? Just 'ell!'"

"Um—m," I said, reflectively.

"Yes, sir," agreed Higgins.

"Um—m," I repeated. "Perhaps I had better drop into his office to-day and see how he is."

"Yes, sir," said Higgins. "I was 'oping you would, sir. That was the reason I took the liberty of coming to see you this morning, sir."

"Quite right," I said. "Do you know whether Mr. Browne has lost anything?"

"Not to my knowledge, sir," replied Higgins.

Then a faint flicker of a smile lit up his face for an instant. "Except perhaps 'e lost his temper for a moment last night, but who wouldn't, sir, with his window smashed, his bedroom a 'oly mess, and a cheeky fireman giving 'im back-talk?"

"Quite so," I said; and Higgins went away.

I quite meant to drop in on Browne that day, but an important letter arrived which took me to a different part of London, and it was not until evening when I returned to my chambers that Browne and his adventures came to my remembrance. After dinner, I was about to sally forth to seek Browne at the Club, when the familiar creak of the stair-step outside my door announced that Browne was seeking me instead. He limped in slowly, greeted me gloomily, sank into his favourite chair, and lit his pipe.

"Haven't you found it yet?" I asked.

"Found what?" asked Browne, starting.

"What you have lost."

"Good Lord, Shad, you're a mind-reader!"

"Oh," I said carelessly, "not difficult with some minds."

"See here," said Browne earnestly, "what do you know?"

"Everything," I said. "To powers such as I possess, nothing is concealed! I know about the attempted burglary, the fire, the fight, the bursted water-main. I can visualize the 'orrible mess your bedroom is in, and I am conscious of the fact that when you lose anything, it is 'ell, just 'ell."

"Higgins," said Browne, relapsing into his chair again.

"Yes, the faithful Higgins," I replied.

"What did he tell you?"

I repeated Higgins's narrative as near as I could remember it. Browne punctuated my paragraphs with sundry grunts and shakes of his head.

"Higgins may have told you all that," said Browne, when I had finished, "but if you will listen, I'll tell you what really happened."

Then Browne told his version of the affair, and his version, combined with details furnished me by other parties, I have chronicled in Chapter I.

"I quite understand," I said, when he had finished his story; "you woke up, touched a live wire charged with chaotic events, got a nerve shock, and lost your dream."

"Confound it, Shad," cried Browne hotly, "it wasn't a dream! It was an idea, I tell you!"

"Well, you lost your idea then," I said soothingly.

"Yes," said Browne, lapsing again into gentle melancholy.

"And that is the cause of your worry, is it?"

"Yes," replied Browne.

"Are you sure it isn't the messed-up condition of your room?"

"Heavens, no! Can't you discern the difference? One is a mere material loss, the other is a mental disaster?"

We were silent for a few moments, then Browne spoke again.

"Several years ago, when I was in the South of France, I came across an Englishman who was collecting butterflies. He was a butterfly hunter or chaser or whatever you call him, one of those chaps

who stalk their prey with a net on a stick and a paper of pins."

"An entomologist," I murmured.

"No, no," said Browne impatiently, "not an entomologist. An entomologist is a curious old Johnny who studies the habits and life-history of fleas and spiders and cockroaches and things that bite in the night; insects are his speciality."

"Well, isn't a butterfly an insect?"

"By no means!" said Browne warmly. "To call a butterfly an insect is to libel one of the most beautiful creations of an Infinite Mind! Call them, if you will, the winged souls of earth-bound crawlers, the resurrected ideals of a misconceived generation, but insects—never!"

I got the dictionary and encyclopædia, and endeavoured to convince Browne that the butterfly was classified as an insect, but after half an hour's argument, Browne still refused to be convinced. He said when it came to butterflies, he took his stand against all these dry-as-dust publications compiled mostly by writers whose imagination was conspicuous only by its absence. Just then, Jarvis came in with a letter. I had found that Jarvis's uneducated intuitions sometimes solved vexing problems. I put the question to him.

"Jarvis," I said, "do you think entomologists would have anything to do with butterflies?"

Jarvis reflected a moment. Then he said, "Not at this season of the year, sir. I should say May-flies or worms for hen—hentomollies just now, sir."

That settled the controversy. When Jarvis had

retired, we agreed to call it close season for entomologists, and Browne resumed his butterfly story.

"This butterfly hunter was hot on the trail of his prey when I met him on a country road. He wore spectacles, he was running, and we met face to face. He bounded into me, bounced off again, said something that wasn't an apology, and kept on running. I watched him. He vaulted over a fence into a field, the butterfly dodged hither and thither, evidently enjoying the chase. He kept his spectacled eyes fixed on the butterfly, and let his feet take care of themselves. They did very well until the ground became marshy. Then they got confused, and their owner came down to see about it. He came down suddenly, and the way he wallowed in the black, sticky mud was simply scandalous! When he reached the road again, I helped to scrape some of the mud off him. All the while he was saying things which were not pretty. I expressed my sympathy at the state of his clothes. 'Clothes be hanged!' he said; 'did you notice which way it went?'

" 'The butterfly?' I asked.

" 'Yes,' he said, 'that was a Purple Admiral!'

" 'Really?' I said.

" 'Yes, of the genus—' here he barked out a Latin name at me. I don't remember what it was, but it had about fourteen syllables.

" 'Remarkable!' I said.

" 'Only six like it known to be in captivity!'

" 'How interesting,' I said.

" 'Which way did it go?' he asked again.

" I told him it seemed to be making for the Mediterranean or Paris, I couldn't be certain which. He

cleaned his spectacles, considered a moment, then started off across the field again, and faded out of my life."

Browne paused to relight his pipe.

"An amusing little story, Jimmy," I said, "but where does the analogy come in? I presume it has an analogy."

"The analogy is this," said Browne, between puffs; "the butterfly chaser didn't care a hang about his ruined clothes or his mud-bespattered countenance. He wanted that butterfly. He was grieved at its loss, and evidently made up his mind to capture that Purple Admiral if he had to chase it over the entire Riviera. The idea of possession obsessed him. Pursuit counted for nothing."

"I see," I interpolated, "country walking to him was the means towards an end, not an end in itself."

"Quite so," said Browne. "Now, that's just my position regarding my loss. I don't care a hang about my ruined room or my blistered foot. The sodden condition of Ajax does not worry me. The remarks of the fireman no longer irritate me. The asinine inquiries of that Irish Police-Inspector fail to raise my temperature, and the anxiety of Higgins leaves me cold! The only thing that matters is the loss of that idea. Compared with that, all the rest sinks into insignificance. And, like the butterfly sleuth-hound, I am going to find that idea! It belongs to me."

"Do you think you would know it again if you saw it?"

"Would I know it?" repeated Browne. "Would you know the sunshine when it bursts through the obscuring clouds? Was it not gold-tinted and rosen-hued, er—I mean, tose-hinted and golden-rued—confound it!—I mean, hose-glinted——"

"Never mind, Jimmy," I interrupted, "we will call it rose-tinted and golden-hued if you wish; but many ideas which come to us are golden-hued and tinted with the *couleur de rose*, temporarily at least. I remember when I bought some rubber shares; for days, the idea of sudden riches lingered golden-hued in my thoughts. The yellow gleam of chinking sovereigns danced before my eyes. By the way, Jimmy, perhaps it was some financial scheme which knocked at your mental door last night. Golden-hued, you know."

"No," said Browne, sighing, "a business idea could never have affected me as I was affected last night. Greed for gold is never rose-tinted. Yellow is its colour-scheme, and the imprint of soiled fingers blends with it. No, it couldn't be that."

"Well, I'm sorry you lost it. Wish I could help you."

"I wish you could, Shad."

We were silent so long that I must have fallen into a doze. The tapping of Browne's pipe against the fender aroused me.

"Perhaps it will come to you again to-night, Jimmy," I said.

"Perhaps, who knows?" said Browne, cheering up.

"And if it does, you grab it!" I said.

"Grab it!" repeated Browne. "Well, rather! Nothing less than chain lightning will be a synonym for my alertness! Good night, Shad." He paused at the door and said, "How is Helen?"

"Oh, quite fit," I answered. "Ankle sprained a bit, not serious, be out in a few days."

"Curious," said Browne, "how Helen and I seem to irritate each other, while you and I rub along so smoothly together. Helen is a nice little girl, but distinctly trying to a man of my disposition. No doubt she will improve as she grows older, or perhaps my disposition will improve. Age has its compensations. It may bring wrinkles, but it also helps to calm and smooth the thought. And a smooth thought is more to be desired than a smooth cheek. Er—you needn't repeat that to Helen. Good night."

After Browne's departure, I sat for a while in deep reverie. Browne's lost idea seemed to oppress me. Ideas. What were they? Where did they come from? I think a thought. Did I conceive it or receive it? Was it true that an Infinite Mind pervaded the Universe? I pondered. At times I seemed to discern an inkling of the truth, only to have it fade away. Was it possible to know the Infinite!

Jarvis came in for my boots, and roused me from my reverie.

"Jarvis," I said, yawning, "did you ever have an idea that was golden-hued and rose-tinted? Was your mentality ever bathed in an aurora of prismatic colouring?"

"Not since I swore off, sir," replied Jarvis.

"If you ever should have such an idea, Jarvis, don't lose it. Jot it down."

"Yes, sir," replied Jarvis. "I have an idea you had better go to bed, sir."

It was a good idea. It pleased me. It was rose-tinted. I went to bed.

CHAPTER XIII

BROWNE told me the next day that the previous night had been uneventful. The lost idea had not returned. He had been fully prepared to receive it. The electric-light switch, the jotting-pad and pencil were all within reach. Like faithful Ajax, he slept with one eye and both ears open, but only one idea came to him. It roused him completely, but it was not rose-tinted, and he did not jot it down. The idea which caused him and the hair on his head to assume an erect position was the idea that some one in the next room was being slowly choked to death. It was some minutes before he could realize that it was only a fellow-clubman informing his neighbours that he slept with his mouth open. When Browne realized the cause of the disturbing sound, he charitably hammered on the partition wall. His fellow-clubman thereupon gurgled, seemed to swallow his epiglottis, and peaceful silence came again.

I saw a great deal of Browne during the next six months. Looking backward to that period, it seems to me that Browne and his affairs, and particularly his lost idea, must have entered largely into my daily life. I have mentioned before that characteristic of Browne which made him desirous of sharing his mental burdens with others. Our long

friendship and intimacy made my shoulders a fit and convenient resting-place upon which to deposit a portion of his burdens. I did not complain. It is quite likely that I practised reciprocity along that line. I do not think Browne ever talked about his lost idea to any one but me. I am certain I never mentioned it to any one else.

For several weeks I treated Browne's lost idea in a joking way. I made various facetious suggestions. Among others, I suggested advertising. To my surprise, Browne received this suggestion gravely, and said he would consider it. One morning, shortly afterwards, I was considerably amused to come across the following advertisement in the *Times* :

"LOST—An idea, rose-tinted and golden-hued. A reward of £100 will be paid to the finder if he will return the idea to its owner. Address, 'Lost Idea,' *Times* Office, London."

A reference to the other morning papers revealed the same advertisement. After dinner that evening I went over to Browne's flat. Answers to the advertisement had begun to arrive. Each of the morning papers had sent a large envelope filled with replies. He was reading them and enjoying himself hugely.

"Sit down, Shad," he said, "and help me open these letters. It is a unique entertainment. Many thanks for your suggestion."

It was certainly a curious form of entertainment. The replies were more varied than the wildest imagination could have pictured beforehand. Some

treated the advertisement as a joke, and joked in return. Several said that they had found the idea somewhat soiled and rumpled, and had taken it to the lost-property office in Scotland Yard. Some seemed to think the advertisement was an invitation to send in ideas which might be patented, the advertiser being expected to finance the inventions. Some of these letters were pathetic. Others wanted further information about the idea. Numerous letters came from financial touts offering to finance his scheme (whatever it was) for a percentage. A few letters contained tracts and admonitions. Others were appeals for charities, the writers evidently thinking that any one offering a reward of £100 for such an intangible thing as an idea must be rich and possibly generous.

We spent a couple of hours laughing at and discussing the various replies. When we had finished the batch, Browne said :

“Shad, I don’t want you to think that I inserted this advertisement merely as a joke. If any one of those letters had given me even a glimpse of the lost idea, I would willingly send the £100 reward. It is difficult to explain, but that idea must come back to me, or there will always be something lacking in my life. It sounds silly to say that, I know, but——”

Just then Higgins came in with a stack of large envelopes filled with more replies.

“Good heavens,” said Browne, “this is more than I expected. I can’t go through these to-night. Pile them on the desk, Higgins.”

Browne had to go out of town the next day, but

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the day following he appeared at my chambers and ordered me to get into his car and go over to his flat for tea.

"I want you to see the result of your advertisement," he said.

"My advertisement?" I said.

"You suggested it, didn't you? I should never have thought of it myself."

When we entered Browne's drawing-room, I stared in amazement at the stacked-up bundles of letters. It was astonishing that so small an advertisement should have produced such a mountainous result.

"Oh, it pays to advertise!" said Browne ruefully. "Replies are now arriving from the provinces. In a few days I shall be hearing from the Continent."

As a matter of fact, he did hear from many places on the Continent. In about three weeks' time letters came from the United States and Canada, and later from Australia, India, South Africa, and other remote countries. Ideas, guaranteed to be rose-tinted all over, tumbled out of the envelopes, wagged their tails at Browne and claimed recognition, but Browne would have none of them. For a few weeks he opened every letter and scanned its contents. He was hopeful for a while, but obtaining no result, he finally ceased to read them, except occasionally one which came from some far country. Higgins finally reduced the whole mass of replies to ashes.

The police authorities, ever on the alert for swindling schemes, did not fail to notice the unusual advertisement and the mass of letters which Browne

was receiving in reply. They instituted quiet but firm inquiries. They sent a Police-Inspector to Browne's flat one morning. Browne was out, and Higgins, not liking the Inspector's face, gave curt and unsatisfactory replies to his inquiries. It was the same Irish Inspector who had figured in the scene on the night when Browne's room was devastated and his idea lost. The Irish Inspector had had his suspicions about the events of that night. He had interviewed the maiden lady who lived in the flat above Browne's. She had told the Inspector that a dog never howled like the dog below her howled that night, without some terrible cause. She had her suspicions as to the cause, but she would not say more, time would tell, etc. Therefore, the Irish Inspector had kept his professional eye on Browne, and when ordered to investigate the abnormal post received by Browne, he did so with alacrity and with very little finesse. He made an open, frontal attack, and Higgins's hostility only increased his suspicions. The same evening he came again, knowing that Browne was at home. In telling me about the Inspector's visit, Browne said that he never knew before how uncomfortable an innocent man could feel when under the investigating eye of the law.

"Oh, he was polite, that Inspector, devilish polite," said Browne, "but when he looked at the stack of letters and then turned his cold, blue gaze on me, I felt as if I had been caught red-handed in the act of printing five-pound bank-notes."

"Wouldn't 'black-handed' express it better?" I suggested.

"Why?" asked Browne.

"There is no red ink used on five-pound notes, you know."

"Shad," said Browne with gentle sarcasm, "your discernment is simply marvellous. I did not use the word 'red-handed' in its literal signification, but with intent to convey to you aphoristically the idea of guilt expressed in allegorization."

"Sorry," I said feebly and apologetically.

"If that is quite plain to you, I will now continue my account of the interview," said Browne. I nodded my assent.

"The Inspector asked permission to look over the letters. I told him he might look over, under, or in them, it was all the same to me. He read two or three, and then continued his cross-examination. He said: 'I see it's an idea ye have lost, Mr. Browne.' I said his eyesight was good. 'Why didn't ye report the loss to the nearest police-station?' I said a police-station was about the last place one would expect to find an idea. He winced a bit at that. Then he asked: 'What was the idea?' I said I didn't know. He got rather excited then. He said: 'Ye have an idea, ye don't know what it is, ye lose it, ye offer £100 to get back what ye nivir had! It looks to me like an attempt to deceive the public!' I said his visualization of the situation was wonderful. He was not pleased with me. He made several entries in his note-book, and seemed to be considering the advisability of taking my thumb-print. Then he abruptly bid me good night, and left."

"I'm afraid you will get into trouble about this, Jimmy."

Browne laughed. "No, I've just been round to Scotland Yard and seen my friend the Superintendent. He has promised to call off the Irish investigator." Then Browne sighed. "I wonder if it will ever return."

"The investigator?" I asked.

"The idea," said Browne.

The summer of that year lingered long, and merged its warmth and colour so gradually into the russet and gold of a mellow autumn that the calendar alone recorded its passing. On the whole, it was a peaceful summer for me, and I was grateful, for I had need of peace. I had to keep peace between Helen and Browne, and the more of the useful commodity I possessed, the less I felt the buffetings which the peacemaker usually receives.

I had frequent opportunities for practising the rôle of peacemaker, although the peace I made was generally a patched affair, and did not wear well or last long. Browne never became a confirmed "country walker," but he joined Helen and me in our jaunts whenever the spirit moved him, or the fear of increasing weight spurred him on. Helen was not happy on these occasions, and she generally succeeded in dampening any cheerfulness in Browne before the walk was over. In my rôle of peacemaker I dissembled happiness, but it was a poor performance. I think the only really happy member of our party was "Jimmy," for his honest joy was not affected by human limitations, but bubbled forth unrestrained. That is one advantage in being a dog.

In addition to my work as peacemaker, I took to

myself the job of worrying about Browne. Browne had changed. There was no doubt about it. From the night that Ajax had attempted to swallow the London water-supply and failed, Browne had not been the same man mentally. The lost idea was preying upon his consciousness. He was frequently depressed, and periods of absent-mindedness seemed to come upon him suddenly. On one occasion his absent-mindedness came near causing tragic results. We were motoring at the time. Browne had offered one day to take us in his car to a certain part of the country where we could leave the car in a garage, and have our usual country walk together. I jumped at the idea, and Helen, who dearly loved motoring but would never admit it to Browne, accepted the offer calmly without jumping, but I caught a gleam in her eyes which betrayed that the jump was struggling but restrained.

It was a beautiful day in early October as we sped along the North Road. Summer had matured and ripened, and the calm of a gathered harvest brooded over the countryside. By the time we reached the garage where we proposed to leave the car, the charm of motoring had woven its spell round us all, and Browne's suggestion that we continue our "country walk" in the car instead of the road was agreed to promptly by both Helen and me. So on we went at sauntering speed, as Browne termed it, stopping frequently to gaze our fill at the landscape, the quaint villages, or the beautiful country estates. There were autumn flowers and berries to be gathered at the roadside. There was autumn-tinted foliage to be cut and piled into the car, and

destined to brighten Aunt Lornia's drawing-room. Once Browne stopped the car and we all entered a wood to secure some red-tinted autumn leaves. As we returned to the car, Browne became silent, and I noticed a far-away look in his eyes. Helen and I took our seats in the car, while Browne went to the front and turned the handle to start the engine. I shall never forget the next few minutes. The engine started, and so did the car with Browne standing in front of it! I was in the back seat, and Helen was in the front seat next to the steering-wheel. I yelled, I saw Browne give a sudden leap upward, I saw him clutch the bonnet desperately, while the car, bounding forward, pushed him backwards along the road. That he would go under the car in a few moments seemed a certainty. I heard Helen gasp with horror, then I saw her slide into the seat behind the steering-wheel. She pulled levers and jammed pedals, and to my unspeakable relief the car stopped with a sickening jolt. Browne released his grip on the bonnet, regained his footing and came round to Helen. His clothes were dusty, and his face was pale. He knew as well as I that Helen's knowledge of a motor-car's mechanism was absolutely nil.

"In heaven's name, Helen, how did you manage to stop the car?" he asked.

Helen laughed hysterically. "I don't know! I just knew it had to be stopped—so I stopped it!"

"But you know nothing about running a car! And you did just the right thing, as good as I could have done it!"

"I know, I know!" said Helen, trembling, but still laughing hysterically; "something inside me

kept saying, 'It must stop, it must stop!' I didn't know what my hands and feet were doing! I'm—I'm glad you are not flattened out on the road back there!"

"Thank you, Helen," said Browne gravely; "I'm glad also. It must feel beastly to be flattened out."

He restarted the engine and took his seat at the wheel. He explained to us in detail how the accident had occurred. I remember it had something to do with ignition, brakes, speed-lever, and "neutral," but we did not grasp the explanation fully. We only knew that the Shadow had come very near to us, and we were not very merry the rest of the afternoon. When we parted from Helen at Aunt Lorina's door, Browne shook Helen's hand, and said:

"Thanks awfully, Helen. I don't know just what to say, but—er——"

"Don't mention it, Jimmy," said Helen, laughing, for she had quite recovered her spirits, "but don't do such a thing again. Remember, the space under a car is limited, and only men built like Shad can afford to take such risks. Good-bye."

Browne stood motionless until she had closed the door, then he shook his head and climbed into the car. When I bid him good-bye at my chambers, Browne said:

"Shad, Helen reminds me of a beautiful rose growing in a garden. Charmed with its loveliness, you stoop to inhale its perfume, when piff! you explode in a sneeze which loosens your immortal soul! Some one has sprinkled the rose with cayenne pepper!"

"Well, Jimmy," I said, "the rose is not yet full blown. Perhaps the summer breeze will shake off the pepper and leave the perfume undisturbed."

Browne shook his head doubtfully.

Aunt Lorina was fond of Browne. She had watched him grow from boyhood into manhood with almost a motherly interest. Aunt Lorina was

slight but dainty in figure. Sixty years had whitened her hair and dimmed the keenness of her sight, but her gentle heart was large, and interest in the objects of her affection did not diminish with advancing years. Aunt Lorina was supposed to have had a "romantic past." She had never married. Even as children we heard that Aunt Lorina



Aunt Lorina sitting in a window-seat

had been "crossed in love." We did not know exactly what it meant, but it invested her in our thought with a halo of romance which never entirely faded. Helen once told me that she had come upon Aunt Lorina sitting in a window-seat with a bundle of letters tied with a faded ribbon in her lap. There were tears in her eyes. Helen crept away before Aunt Lorina saw her. She said

she knew that Aunt Lorina was in company with her "romantic past" and had no use at that moment for the prosaic present.

Browne was always welcome at Aunt Lorina's. He would frequently drop in at tea-time. I think Aunt Lorina was about the only member of the feminine sex with whom Browne felt entirely at ease. In her society I have seen him converse with freedom and enjoyment; but let Helen or any other of her sex enter the room, and Browne would become embarrassed and retire into the conversational background. I wish I might tell of our for-gatherings at Aunt Lorina's. There were episodes not unsprinkled with humour which might be recorded. But I find that my drifting thoughts have taken me to a night in early spring about nine months after Browne's idea had roused him from his slumbers only to vanish in the subsequent turmoil.

Aunt Lorina, Helen, Browne, and I were seated at supper in my chambers. We had just returned from the theatre. We were all in good spirits. The play had been entertaining, and we were all dramatically inartistic enough to have enjoyed the happy ending. Browne said according to all the established rules of dramatic art, the final curtain should have descended on a scene of unrelieved gloom. No really great play, he said, ever sent its audience away with cheerful thoughts. He said he supposed the manager and author had agreed to forgo greatness in the play in order to instil that quality into the box-office receipts. There were "pot-boilers" in theatres as well as in artists' studios.

Curious, he said, how fond the ignorant public were of "pot-boilers."

Helen was beautiful that night. The ivory-white of her rounded arms and shoulders set off the delicate pink flush of her cheeks, the blue of her laughing eyes, and the red-gold of her hair. Her dress was white, and about her neck hung a strand of pearls belonging to Aunt Lorina. We were a merry party. Browne's conversation sparkled, and his sallies of humour "set the table on a roar." Aunt Lorina laughed until she cried. There was little need of my rôle of peacemaker, and I sighed with contentment as I snuggled in my chair. It was a relief to be off duty. While we were in the midst of our merriment, a rather strange thing occurred. Browne suddenly paused in the telling of a funny story, and stared intently at Helen, who was seated opposite him. The expression of his face changed, his eyes took on a far-away look, and he seemed to be gazing not only at Helen but through and beyond her. The pause was but momentary, but it was so marked that Helen flushed very red, and said :

"Is it a ghost or only a smut on my nose, Jimmy? Please don't leave me in suspense!"

As she spoke, the far-away look in Browne's eyes vanished. He passed his hand across his forehead, laughed, and said :

"Please excuse me, Helen. I was just trying to recall something which—er—never mind, it's gone again."

He plunged once more into his story, and in a few moments the incident was swamped in our laughter. It was after this that Browne got to talking about the drama, and from that theme it was but a step

to the Shakespeare-Bacon controversy. Browne, as I have mentioned before, was an ardent Baconian, and once started on his favourite topic, it was difficult to change the conversation. Helen, I am convinced, had no settled convictions either way, but the spirit of mischief began to dance in her eyes, and before I was aware, she had lured the Shakespeare-Bacon controversy to our peaceful suppertable, and as the defender of Shakespeare was waging war with Browne, the champion of Bacon. Aunt Lorina and I, as the special jury, were appealed to in turn by the disputants.

Helen, no doubt, began the controversy purely in the spirit of fun, but as the dispute went on, and Browne's indictment of Shakespeare grew more vehement, Helen became defiant, mainly because her knowledge of the merits of the case was not sufficient to meet Browne's well-informed arguments. By this time I had wearily resumed my rôle of peacemaker. Securing a volume of Shakespeare from my bookshelf, I laid it on the table between the contestants, and said :

"Dear warriors, somebody wrote this book. We all are agreed on that. What difference does it make if it was Shakespeare, Bacon, or Bunyan? 'What's in a name?'"

"Very true," said Aunt Lorina, soothingly.

"Everything is in a name!" flashed Helen. "Especially in this case. Bacon indeed! It would spoil my enjoyment of that immortal book if I thought it was written by him! Bacon! The name conveys to me the thought of fat. I can't help it, I dislike fat things, and I always shall."

I do not think Helen meant anything personal, but unwittingly she had probed that sensitive spot in Browne's character, and he winced and collapsed. He arose from his seat, bowed gravely, and said :

"I am extremely sorry to have started this controversy. Good night."

Before I could get out of my chair, Browne had taken hat and top-coat, stalked to the door and disappeared.

Aunt Lorina said, "Helen ! "

I sprang towards the door, but even as I laid my hand on the knob I heard the familiar creak of that defective stair-step ; but this time the creak turned into a crack, and then came a crash, a succession of thuds, and finally a groan. The creaking step had given way, and Browne had fallen down-stairs ! I flung the door open and darted to the head of the stairs. Browne lay huddled up at the bottom. Quick as were my movements, Helen's were quicker. She brushed me aside and darted down the stairway. Before I was half-way down, she had knelt beside Browne and raised his head in her arms. His eyes were closed, the pallor of unconsciousness was on his face, and the blood welled from a nasty cut in his forehead.



She had knelt beside Browne and raised his head in her arms

"Jimmy! Jimmy!" wailed Helen.

Then, to my intense amazement, she bent her head and kissed him tenderly on the lips. At the touch of her lips, Browne opened his eyes and gazed full into the beautiful face bending over him. What he saw in Helen's eyes seemed to satisfy him, for he gave a contented sigh, closed his eyes, and relapsed again into unconsciousness. The noise of the fall had awakened Jarvis and his wife, and they were soon on the scene. Water and bandages were brought, but it was a quarter of an hour before Browne stood weakly erect and declared that his bones were intact. With the help of Jarvis I got him up again to my chambers, and deposited him on my Chesterfield. He was badly shaken, but resolutely vetoed any suggestions about a doctor. Helen had not said much since her cry of "Jimmy!" but she busied herself in making Browne comfortable. She bathed his wound, and adjusted the bandages with gentle touch. She arranged the pillows under his head in the comforting way which every woman knows but which no mere man ever attains. Browne seemed to enjoy Helen's ministrations immensely. He closed his eyes and sighed contentedly. Once, when Helen had gone into the dining-room for something, Browne called to me.

"Shad," he said. I went to his side and bent over him.

"What is it, Jimmy?"

"I have found it, Shad!"

"Found what, Jimmy?"

"The lost idea!"

" Really, Jimmy ? "

" Yes, it came floating down that beastly, blessed stairway, all rose-tinted and golden-hued ! It kissed me on the lips and nestled in my heart ! "

" You mean——"

" Helen ! " said Browne, sighing contentedly again.

I became anxious. This was plainly delirium.

" Won't you let me call a doctor, Jimmy ? "

" No, I'm all right. "

" But your mind seems to be wandering, Jimmy. "

" Does it ? "

" Yes, you've got Helen and the lost idea mixed up together. "

" That's all right. They are one and the same. "

" You mean, you—you care for Helen ? "

" Love is the word, Shad. "

" But I thought——"

" I know you did, Shad. "

" But you said——"

" I know I did, Shad. "

" How about the ' cayenne pepper ' ? "

" There never was any ' cayenne pepper, ' " said Browne, smiling. " I was only a blind fool with a cold in the head ! "

Just then Helen and Aunt Lorina joined us. Aunt Lorina took me gently but firmly by the arm and led me into the dining-room. I paused in the doorway and looked back at Browne. He was sitting up with Helen by his side. His arm was out her waist, and it was evident, even to my

feeble comprehension, that the "lost idea," extremely rose-tinted now, was "jotted down" for permanent preservation.

"I don't understand," I said to Aunt Lorina.

"You wouldn't, Shad dear, being just a man. I understood long ago," said Aunt Lorina.

CHAPTER XIV

BROWNE and Helen were married about three months after the "lost idea" floated down my "beastly, blessed stairway." Those three months will always remain in my memory as a period when the somewhat even current of my life became a series of turbulent rapids interspersed with jagged rocks of problems, with only now and then a stretch of placidity to soothe and calm. Those quiet stretches I found at my desk, with "Jimmy" curled up in his chair as my only companion. These stretches were not long. They were only the intervals between the rapids, and soon the rapids (personified by Helen, or Browne, or Aunt Lorina, or Jones, or all together) would burst into view, and the rocks (typified by the thousand-and-one arrangements for the "great event") would have to be negotiated.

Jones was to be Browne's "best man." I had always expected to act in that capacity if Browne ever married, but I had never thought Browne would marry Helen. Under the circumstances, I was appointed to the paternal position of the one who "gave Helen away." As neither Browne nor Helen ever asked my consent to the marriage, but simply took it for granted, the heavy paternal rôle might have been cut out with advantage to all concerned. Indeed, I suggested that it should be cut out, but

the manager insisted that the part was absolutely necessary, and that I alone could and should play it. The manager was Jones.

I might explain here that it was to be a church wedding. I think both Browne and Helen would have preferred a quiet marriage at a registrar's, but when this was hinted to Aunt Lorina, that gentle lady's eyes filled with tears. She said she had looked forward to a real church wedding for Helen. A marriage at a registrar's, she said, was legal no doubt, but in comparison with a church wedding, it was like a plain cloth costume compared to a beautiful evening gown. The plain cloth costume was effective as a covering, she said, but the evening gown was infinitely more becoming and satisfying.

So, in deference to Aunt Lorina's wishes, a church wedding was decided upon. Having made this decision, Browne and Helen agreed that no pains should be spared to make the wedding an event satisfying in every respect to Aunt Lorina's concept of a "real church wedding." After considerable discussion, we agreed on the church. It was a favourite church for weddings. Very old itself, it nestled amid trees in the shadow of an historic pile still older. The roar of London's traffic beat against its aged walls, but disturbed not the dust of ancient ancestors beneath its stone-flagged floor.

Jones, as I have said, was Browne's "best man." (Jones was unmarried at this time). I was surprised when I learned that Browne had appointed Jones. I asked Browne how he came to do it. Browne said, as a matter of fact, he had not appointed him in any formal way.

" You see, Shad, Jones's family and mine are distantly connected. His grandmother was the sister-in-law of my great-uncle, or something like that. So, in a way, Jones and I are related. It isn't a relationship close enough to be insisted upon, but it might be hinted at on occasions. When Jones heard of my engagement to Helen, he hinted, made suggestions, and ended by taking charge of me. I think it will be all right. Jones isn't such a bad chap, and it's really wonderful how he goes ahead and throws himself into it. Quite a relief to have a " best man " like him."

As Browne was satisfied, I made no further comment, but my mind was not entirely at ease.

The energy of Jones soon began to make itself felt. He began as Browne's " best man," and ended by managing the whole affair. Helen, Aunt Lorina, and I, as well as Browne, came gradually under his dictatorial rule. At frequent intervals he called a meeting, which was usually held in Aunt Lorina's drawing-room. Here, he would map out the plan of campaign, while we meekly listened. I must admit the plan was skilfully drawn. No detail seemed to be wanting to make the wedding a brilliant success.

One of the first things Jones took in hand was the ordering of the wedding invitations. They were most beautifully engraved specimens of the printer's art, and Helen was delighted with them until I discovered that the printer had omitted the terminal " e " in Browne's name. We were both rather dubious then. I telephoned Browne, and asked his opinion about the terminal " e." What he said

over the 'phone caused me to ring off hastily and call up Jones. Jones was inclined to treat the matter lightly, but when I repeated Browne's words, he said it was all the fault of those fool printers, and he would see about it at once. We were several days late in sending out the wedding invitations, but Browne's name was spelt correctly. He said to me afterwards that the omission of the final letter made his name a mere colour, and a beastly uninteresting colour too.

One matter which seemed to cause Jones a good deal of worry was the choice of a place in which to hold the reception after the wedding. Aunt Lorina and Helen had decided to hold the reception at Aunt Lorina's house in Chelsea, and Browne approved. But Jones demurred. He said the size and importance of the house in Chelsea did not compare favourably with the other part of the arrangements. A wedding at the church we had chosen should be followed by a reception in some imposing mansion. He said in this way only could the unities be preserved. One day, he hurriedly called a meeting at Aunt Lorina's. Lady Pushem of Portbellnor Square, he told us, had kindly offered the use of her house for the wedding reception. Not only that. She had offered to act as hostess, and guaranteed the presence of at least six well-known society people whose doings were almost daily chronicled by the Press, and whose photographs appeared constantly in the illustrated papers.

"Very kind of her," said Helen; "but I am not honoured with her acquaintance."

"Nor I," said Browne.

"Oh," said Jones, "that need not make the slightest difference. You see, it is—er—only a matter of—er—a cheque. Her ladyship is temporarily in need of funds, and——"

We politely but unanimously informed Jones that there was "nothing doing," and adjourned the meeting. Jones was cast down for a while, but finally decided to see what could be done with Aunt Lorina's house. He planned and planned. He interviewed florists and decorators and caterers, and I must admit that in the end he succeeded in disguising the interior of Aunt Lorina's cosy house so completely that Aunt Lorina said she felt like a stranger in her own home.

Jones, of course, made all the arrangements connected with the church ceremonies. He had a talk with the vicar, arranged about the banns, appointed the ushers, secured the licence, hired the organist, and selected the music. He planned the floral decorations, and did not forget to arrange for a supply of policemen to keep back the crowds. He was a busy man, was Jones.

As the date of the wedding drew near, Jones announced that we must have a rehearsal of the wedding ceremony to avoid any risk of confusion when the real ceremony occurred. One evening we all met at Aunt Lorina's. The bridesmaids, the head usher, and the organist were present. A gentleman friend of Browne's kindly offered to read the marriage service. The evening was far advanced before Jones was satisfied that we all understood our duties. Even when we had dispersed, and Jones, Browne, and I were walking together towards

Kensington, Jones still had an item of arrangement to disclose. He said :

"I dare say you know how frequently wedding ceremonies have been boggled by the failure of the bridegroom to produce the ring at the critical moment. He either forgets to bring it, or he fails to remember the pocket in which he placed it, or he drops it in his confusion, and it rolls away under a pew. I maintain that no bridegroom on the day of his wedding is a fit person to be entrusted with the wedding-ring. Now, what I suggest is this : let me, as best man, have charge of the ring. I shall wear it on my little finger. When the moment arrives, I shall slip it off, hand it to Browne, and the thing is done safely and neatly. How does the idea strike you ? "

Browne said he had no objection, and then and there handed over the ring to Jones, who found it to be a neat fit for his little finger.

Then came days filled with little flurries of excitement as Helen bobbed in at my chambers to tell me of some new wedding present just arrived, or to show me the pictures of herself and Browne in the illustrated papers, for Jones had not forgotten that item. Sometimes I helped Helen compose her letters of thanks to the senders of the presents. We tried to make the letters all different, but I am afraid they were not greatly so. Each letter, of course, assured the sender that his or her present was the one thing Helen had been longing for. Helen said this statement was true in regard to the first set of fish-carvers she received, but it could not be strictly true about the other six sets. I told her not

to worry. She must view duplicate presents from the standpoint of the future. When the first set of fish-carvers wore out, she would long for another set, and lo, here they were !

One day, while Aunt Lorina, Helen, and Browne were having tea at my chambers, Jarvis ushered in an old friend whom we had not seen for over a year. It was Green, Billy Green of New York. It was a happy meeting. Green shook hands all round with his fervent American grip, then sank into an easy chair, while terrier " Jimmy " established himself in his lap with delighted recognition.

" Well, folks," said Green, " I see you are still toying with the ' cup that cheers,' though why you should beats me ! You all look cheerful enough, Lord knows ! There's ecstatic joy registered on Browne's face, ethereal happiness suffuses the countenance of Helen, and Auntie here looks like a frolicsome two-year-old ! What's doing ? Is it the tea or me ? "

Aunt Lorina laughed, Browne and Helen looked at each other, and I started to tell Green about the coming romantic event. But Green stared intently at Helen and Browne for a moment, then he said :

" Wait ! Wait a moment, don't tell me. I'm the riddle-guesser from Puzzletown ! I just want to know if you have a spare invitation, and whether I've got time to order some glad clothes ! "

Then we all exploded in laughter and talk, and Green had to shake hands all round again.

Two days later, Helen danced into my chambers and laid a flat parcel on my desk. I opened it at her request, and found a plush-lined case containing a

magnificent rope of pearls. A card enclosed read, "From Billy Green, with best wishes for your happiness." While we were examining the beautiful present, Browne came in. He too carried a plush-lined case which he opened and placed beside Green's on my desk. Browne's case contained a superb diamond and ruby necklace. Helen gave a gasp of delight, and eagerly scanned the card accompanying the present. It read, "For the bride of the son of Nathaniel Browne."

"Who sent it, Jimmy?" cried Helen.

"It was delivered at my office this morning," said Browne, "just as you see it, with no name attached."

A gleam of remembrance flashed across my mind.

"Witherspun!" I cried.

"That's my guess too," said Browne.

"Who is Witherspun?" asked Helen.

Then Browne told Helen about his interview with Witherspun several years before. When he had finished, Helen said:

"And you never told me to send him an invitation!"

"I did not think he would care about one," said Browne. "I have never seen him since that day, although business correspondence has passed between us."

Helen thought for a moment, then she said:

"Jimmy, I want you to take me to Mr. Witherspun's office, now. I wish to thank him personally for this lovely present and to invite him to our wedding."

Browne shrugged his shoulders, then laughed and said:

"I will! Come along, Helen; it will be another frontal attack, but I honestly believe old Witherspun will like it!"

They went away, but the next day Helen said to me, "Shad, Mr. Witherspun is a dear, and he is coming to our wedding."

"The frontal attack succeeded again, eh?"

"It wasn't a frontal attack," said Helen, "it was just a 'walk-over.' I looked into his eyes, and loved him, and found the way to his heart. And his heart is all right, Shad, it only needed warming up."

"And you supplied the warmth, did you, Helen?"

"He kissed me," said Helen.

The day before the wedding, Jones came to see me. He wanted to be sure that I quite understood my duties, and that I would adhere strictly to the schedule arranged for the morrow. He put me through a strict examination, and I passed fairly creditably. His parting words were:

"Remember, I shall arrive at the church with Browne at 1.50 p.m. You must arrive with Helen not later than 1.55 p.m. The bridesmaids, of course, must be there a few minutes before. At 2 p.m. promptly, the organ will play, and with Helen on your arm, you will march up the aisle to the altar where Browne and I will be awaiting you. Now, for goodness' sake, don't keep us waiting beyond the set time! In my opinion, nothing upsets the nerves of a highly strung bridegroom like being kept waiting by a tardy bride."

When I thought he had gone, he reopened the door to say:

"Don't forget the gardenia for your buttonhole,

and please, please don't wink at Browne when you meet at the altar. Nothing upsets the nerves of a highly strung bridegroom like being winked at."

I pride myself even unto this day that I did my part excellently well on Helen's wedding-day. I arrived at the church with Helen at 1.55 p.m., as per schedule, having sent the bridesmaids and Aunt Lorina, in charge of Billy Green, on ahead. I assisted Helen from the limousine, and I must chronicle that never a fairer or sweeter bride tripped with daintier feet along the red carpet which ran beneath the awning to the door of the ancient church. There was a buzz of delight from the assembled crowd, cameras clicked and cinema machines whirred, and even the stalwart "Bobbies" smiled approval at the vision of youthful loveliness. We entered the door of the church, and then—the head usher told us that Browne and Jones had not yet arrived!

There are a few episodes in one's life which one does not willingly call up from the buried past. Sometimes they unaccountably resurrect themselves, and dance mockingly in our memory until we thrust them by force into their sepulchre, and cover them up again. Therefore, I shall not enlarge upon the state of feeling pervading the bridal party while they awaited the coming of the tardy bridegroom. Suffice it to say, that at 2.05 p.m. everybody in the crowded church knew that the bridegroom had not arrived; and at 2.15 p.m. everybody had formulated or been told a reason for his non-arrival. A few of the whispered reasons which were flying about reached the bridal party in the vestry. We heard

that Browne had been arrested for forgery, for bigamy, and for exceeding the speed limit. We heard that he was probably dead, ill, demented, or had eloped with another girl. Helen was wonderful. She sat quite calmly chatting with her bridesmaids. Once she called me to her and whispered :

"Shad, dear, it will be all right, don't worry. Jimmy will come."

Helen was right. Jimmy came, and they were married. But at this point I want to tell what delayed Jimmy.

Browne, accompanied by Jones, left the door of his flat at 1.30 p.m. Jones had calculated that it would take twenty minutes to motor to the church. Browne's flat was on the third floor. Spick and span, with gardenias in their buttonholes, the two men stepped into the hallway, and walked to the lift. To their mild surprise the lift was at the third floor, the iron gate and door were open, but the lift-boy was absent. They rang the bell and waited a few moments, but the lift-boy came not. Jones grew impatient. His finely drawn schedule of time was being interfered with.

"Step in, Jimmy," he said, "I'll take you down."

"It's an electric lift. Do you know how to run it?" asked Browne.

Jones shrugged his shoulders and smiled in his superior way. Like a film actor, he intimated without words that he had been born and brought up in a lift. Browne hesitated, knowing nothing about the running of the lift himself, but time as well as Jones pressed, and he yielded to both and stepped in. Jones closed the iron gate and the door of the

lift, turned the starting-handle, and the lift shot up two floors before he could stop it.

"Ah," said Jones calmly, "turned it the wrong way."

He turned the handle carefully the other way, and the lift went slowly down until it was between the second and third floors, and then it stopped dead.

"Ah," said Jones, still calmly, "faulty contact. I'll have it fixed in a moment."

He unscrewed something, and fumbled among the wires and set-screws. There was a slight flash and an odour of burned kid gloves.

"Ah!" said Jones, not so calmly, "short circuit, fuse gone!"

Browne's composure vanished with the fuse. He raised his voice. He shouted for the lift-boy. The lift-boy finally heard him; so did the occupants of all the flats on the second and third floors. They flocked to the scene. The door of the lift locked automatically, and could only be opened at the landings. Browne and Jones explained the situation to the lift-boy and others. As both the imprisoned men wished to explain at the same time, the explanation was not lucid, and the lift-boy was puzzled to know what to do. He received plenty of advice from the assembled onlookers, but it was not until Higgins arrived that something was done. When Higgins found that his master was in the stranded lift instead of on his way to the church, that excellent man rose to the occasion. He secured a hatchet, forced open the iron gate at the third-floor landing, jumped down on the top of the lift,

and heroically chopped a hole in the top regardless of expense. Encouraged by Browne, he enlarged the hole until it was big enough to squeeze the lift-boy through. After entering the lift, it took that intelligent lad just thirty seconds to adjust a new fuse. Thirty seconds later, Browne and Jones stepped out of the lift at the ground-floor level, and bolted for the limousine waiting at the street entrance. It was then 2 p.m. Jones had calculated it would take twenty minutes to reach the church. Browne told his chauffeur if he took over ten minutes he would murder him as soon as he had finished off Jones. It was not the fault of the chauffeur that it took over ten minutes. It was the fault of the absurd speed regulations. Three times they were held up by traffic policemen, just because the speedometer pointer was wagging around the fifty-mile-per-hour mark. Browne explained each time that he was on his way to his wedding, but the policemen were not sympathetic. One "Bobby" remarked that he (Browne) would soon be on his way to his funeral if he kept up the pace. Each of the three policemen took Browne's name and address, car number, and examined the chauffeur's licence. This consumed time, and it was 2.40 p.m. when they reached the church.

When Browne entered the vestry, there was no time for elaborate explanations. He just caught Helen's hand and mine in his two, and savagely whispered, "Jones!" Then, everything being in readiness, he walked out with Jones and took his place at the altar. In a few moments I, with Helen on my arm, attended by her bridesmaids, marched

up the aisle. The hideous period of waiting was past, and all was well.

With the beginning of the old but beautiful marriage service, a peaceful calm seemed to smooth away the ripples of excitement. Have I mentioned that it was a lovely day? It was. June days in London are not always so perfect, nor does the sunlight always stream so clearly through the stained-glass windows of the ancient church as it did on Helen's wedding-day.

I have said a peaceful calm prevailed. There was a slight exception. Jones was not calm. I could see that distinctly. He fidgeted, mopped his brow with his handkerchief, played with the lapels of his coat, looked at his watch occasionally with the air of a man who had to catch a certain train, and a worried, almost frightened expression never left his face.

At the "give away" point in the marriage service, I spoke my one and only line. I was well up in my part, and quite letter-perfect. When the vicar inquired who gave the blushing bride to the radiant bridegroom, I answered boldly, "I do." I have never been able to understand why Jones should have imagined himself to be my understudy, and have answered "I do" at the same moment. But he did, and it made a mild confusion in the proceedings. The gentle old vicar looked first at me, and then at Jones. He smiled and repeated the question. Again I answered, "I do," and Jones was silent, but if any man's face was ever redder than Jones's, I have never seen the man.

No further mishap occurred until we arrived at the point where the bridegroom slips the ring on the

finger of the bride. Browne turned to Jones for the ring. Jones was looking at his watch. He started, slipped his watch into his pocket, and tried to get the ring off his little finger. It only took him a second to realize that you cannot get a ring off a finger when the ring and the finger are covered with a kid glove. You have to take the glove off first. Jones knew this simple fact, had known it for years, no doubt, but as I have said, Jones was not calm, and he had forgotten about the ring being covered by the glove. The glove was a tight fit and somewhat scorched. Nervous haste is never a kindly friend at such a moment. Jones tugged, and his face acquired such a crimson hue that the perspiration fire-sprinkler came into action and bathed his countenance in a timely dew. It was a near thing to spontaneous combustion. Browne kept holding out his hand for the ring, and Jones tried his best to deliver the goods. As I watched the struggles of Jones, these words kept formulating themselves in my thought: "Nothing upsets a highly strung bridegroom like being kept waiting for his ring!"

Strange to say, however, Browne did not appear to be upset, and I soon discovered why. He waited until Jones had finally ripped off his glove, but when he discovered by Jones's further exertions that Jones's finger had swollen and the ring was firmly embedded thereon, Browne abandoned his best man to his heated oblivion of embarrassment. Browne calmly produced another ring from his waistcoat pocket, and the service proceeded. Browne told me later that after he had surrendered the ring to Jones on the night of the rehearsal, he felt worried,



*Browne kept holding out his hand for
the ring, and Jones tried his best to
deliver the goods*

and the next day he bought a duplicate ring for use in case of emergency.

The service ended. The great organ pealed forth the Wedding March of Mendelssohn, and Helen and Browne went down the aisle together. At the door, the sunshine of the perfect June day greeted them, and the ceaseless voice of London roared its unconscious welcome. Swiftly the comfortable limousine bore them along the road towards Chelsea, but subconscious, no doubt, in the thought of both Helen and Browne, was the thought of the New Road which stretched out before them, the road which they had promised each other to tread as joyous comrades, even until the journey's end should take them "over the Hill."

The wedding reception at Aunt Lorina's was much the same as other receptions of the kind. One remarkable feature about it to me was the way in which Browne unbent and let himself go. His former timidity in the presence of the fair sex seemed to have vanished with his bachelorhood. I beheld him now in the midst of a merry throng of girls, laughing, joking, as one to the manner born. Another remarkable feature was the fact that Billy Green and old Mr. Witherspun became fast friends at the reception. Browne brought them together, and they seemed mutually attracted. It would be hard to find two business men with more widely different characteristics, but this very difference seemed to accentuate their interest in each other.

The only person at the reception who did not seem happy was Jones. Poor Jones wandered about in a disconsolate way, and seemed very ill at ease.

Browne, by this time, had told me the reason for his delayed appearance at the church, but as all had ended well, he said he had forgiven Jones. He had shaken him by the hand, had clapped him on the back and told him to "buck up!" Browne was too happy at that moment to hold ill-feeling against any one. But Jones did not seem able to "buck up," and later, as I was talking with some guests, he came and touched me on the shoulder. I turned, and the worried look in his eyes quite startled me.

"Get Browne," he whispered, "and come upstairs. I've something to tell you."

Alarmed by his manner, I managed to get Browne away quietly, and we three went upstairs to a little room which Aunt Lorina called her library. I closed the door, and Browne said:

"Well, what is it?"

Jones hesitated a moment; then he blurted out:

"Jimmy, I am awfully sorry, but I don't think you are legally married."

Browne stared at Jones for a moment, then he looked at me.

"Never mind, Jones, old man," he finally said.

"I know you have had a strenuous time, but you will be all right. Just lie down here on the sofa, and I'll bring you a brandy and soda."

"No, really, Jimmy," cried Jones, "I'm perfectly clear. I mean it. I don't think you are legally married."

"What do you mean?" asked Browne sharply.

"I mean," replied Jones, "that to be legally married, according to English law, the ceremony must take place before three o'clock."

"Well?" said Browne.

"Well," continued Jones, "it was three o'clock before you placed the ring on Helen's finger. I am positive of this, because I looked at my watch."

"Is this a fact, Shad?" asked Browne.

"I really cannot say," I replied; "but I remember Jones looking at his watch."

Then Browne grew excited and strode about the little room. First, he called Jones an ass, and said it was nonsense. Then he began to think there might be something in it, and that made him more furious still. Finally he said:

"Shad, you and Jones have got to see the vicar at once—and clear this matter up! We haven't much time to spare. Take my car, and say nothing to Helen or any one. Get along, quick! O Lord, what a day!"

Jones and I hurried off, and Browne returned to his guests. Fortunately, we found the vicar at home, and Jones explained the reason for our call. Being in an agitated frame of mind, his explanation was not remarkable for its clearness, and he had to explain some two or three times before the vicar understood. When the vicar finally caught Jones's meaning, he turned to me and said:

"Your sister was married before three o'clock, and the marriage is quite legal."

"But," said Jones, "it was three o'clock before the ring was placed on her finger."

"You are mistaken," said the vicar quietly.

"But I looked at my watch," insisted Jones.

"May I see your watch?" asked the vicar.

side that England has been asleep. We haven't! If we had there might be some excuse for us. We have been wide awake! With our eyes wide open we have allowed ourselves to be fooled, tricked, deceived! So have our Allies, so have the neutral nations. If a criminal bludgeons or chloroforms you, and then relieves you of your watch, you are an unfortunate victim and deserve pity. If, on the other hand, he smiles at you, fawns on you, is friendly and even affectionate, tells you interesting and funny stories, and at the same time lifts your watch, you are a fool! And a fool and his watch are soon parted! That's the reason for the world's condition to-day. We have listened with smiling complacency to stories of the nation who built a gigantic navy 'for peaceful purposes,' that created, trained, and armed the mightiest army the world has ever seen just 'for home defence,' that manufactured incredible stores of munitions, working night and day, just to 'keep labour employed,' that developed a spy system which has wormed its way into the affairs of every other nation in the guise of 'peaceful penetration'! And we believed it all! Now we have got to pay the price of our folly. That is why I am in khaki. That is why we have all got to get into khaki! Lord knows, I hate the beastly cloth and all it stands for! But we have got to see it through! There's nothing else for it."

"But," I said, "everything is all right, isn't it? We shall soon have them beaten."

"Shad," replied Browne earnestly, "everything is all wrong! We are short of guns, short of shells, short of rifles and ammunition, short of transport,

short of men and officers, short, in fact, of everything except complacent politicians who tell us that everything is all right! We have a surplus of them! They don't know yet they have lost their watches!"

"But the papers say——"

"The Press is muzzled," interrupted Browne. "Only one or two papers have been brave enough to push their muzzles off and bark! More power to their lungs!"

"Where do you get this information, Jimmy?"

"I can't tell you, Shad; not now. But take it from me, it is the straightest tip ever given. You will see how true it is later on."

"Then you think England and the Allies are really in peril?"

"The world is in peril, Shad. The highest ideals of men which make for progress are in danger of extinction. This is no ordinary war between nations. A far greater significance is attached to it. And we are in danger of losing when we have simply got to win! We are all needed. I'm off now to see Helen. I have only a few hours' leave. Think it over, old chap."

After Browne had gone, I sat for a long time at my desk staring at the blank page of my pad. I was "thinking it over." As a result, three weeks later I was lined up with Browne, with O.T.C. on the shoulders of my khaki jacket. In due course we received our commissions, were assigned to the same infantry regiment, and a few months later found ourselves "somewhere in France."

Before I left, Billy Green dropped into London

and offered to take over my chambers and care for "Jimmy" during my absence.

"Just thought I'd come over and see if I could be of any help," he said. "I'm too old for khaki, I guess, but I'm not old enough to be neutral!"

Higgins, too, donned the khaki, and was in the troop-train which took us down to the coast. Helen, Aunt Lorina, and Billy Green were at the station to see us off, and "Jimmy" and "Ajax" were there also. I need not dwell on the parting scenes. Has it not always been the same since war began? Has not always a surface cheerfulness prevailed but thinly veiling the welling tears beneath? Will it not always be so while war exists and loving hearts are brave?

Arrived in France, Browne's rumours proved true. There was a war on. In my boyhood days, like the average boy, I had found a strange joy in viewing battle scenes depicted on canvas in our national galleries, or in poring over battle pictures in books. The charging squadrons of cavalry clad in bright-coloured uniforms, the compact masses of infantry with their gleaming bayonets and tattered battle flags, the drummer-boys well to the front beating the charge, the smoke of the cannon, the staggering drop of hit men who always fell backwards, and the general who led the charge, clad always in a gorgeous uniform heavy with gold braid and decorations, and riding a magnificent steed whose colour was almost invariably white—these battle scenes stirred my young blood, as they have stirred other young blood, until war became a symbol for glory, and a uniform the hall-mark of courage.

When the artist paints faithfully the pictures of modern warfare, will the scenes depicted stir the young blood of the coming generations with the same enthusiasm and desire to "be in it"? Where now the brilliant uniforms, the prancing steeds, the waving flags, the compact masses of cheering, charging men? Will pictures of foul ditches where mud-begrimed men wade knee-deep in liquid ooze, of uniforms whose colour blends with the torn earth, of writhing tangles of rusting barbed-wire, of slow-rolling volumes of poisoned gas straight from the mouth of hell, of men in hideous, nightmare masks, of charges against an unseen foe spitting forth a rattling hail of death, of festering forms in No-man's Land, of ruined homes, of landscapes so drear, so desolate, so hopeless, that Dante himself might hesitate to describe or Doré to paint—will these pictures glorify war in youthful minds, or stir young blood as in the past? Perhaps, who knows? Young blood is an uncertain and curious substance. Of one thing, however, I am certain—these war pictures will not stir the mature minds of this generation to other thoughts than those of horror and detestation.

Browne and I found the war in France about the middle of 1915. The middle of 1916 found our regiment still "doing its bit" on the line which gashed old Mother Earth from Switzerland to the sand-dunes of Belgium. No great events took place on our sector during the year, nothing that will stand out prominently in the history of the war. We just helped to hold the enemy back while England and France prepared, prepared, prepared.

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The holding back was not always easy, but harder still to bear was the deadly monotony of the watchful waiting. At times we hailed with a kind of fierce joy the excitement of an attack. It broke the monotony even if it left gaps in the regiment. Slowly the personnel of our regiment changed as the gaps opened and were filled by fresh recruits. Before the middle of 1916, Browne was captain of his company, and I was senior lieutenant. We had both come through unscathed, save for slight wounds which did not necessitate leaving the front.

Captain Jimmy Browne was the same Browne who used to sit on Boards in the City, who used to occupy the easiest chair in my chambers at tea-time, who used to love a peaceful life and pursue it, but physically Browne was a changed man. Where now the well-fed appearance, the accumulation of adipose tissue which used to worry and irritate him? No need for sensitiveness on that point now. Tall, broad-shouldered, hard as nails, without an ounce of superfluous flesh, with sunken cheeks tanned and weather-beaten, eyes clear and keen, an athletic form whose every movement betokened perfect muscular action—that was Captain Jimmy Browne. Beloved by his men because he considered their welfare, cheerfully obeying his commands because they trusted him and knew that the discipline he exacted was not the petty naggings of a martinet, Captain Jimmy and his company were mutually proud of each other. Kind but firm, brave but not foolhardy, alert but not suspicious, these were qualities which endeared him to his men. "Our Jim" they came to call him. That is, all but one

man. To Higgins he was Captain Browne. Except on one memorable occasion, of which I shall speak later, Higgins could never be induced to call him "Our Jim." Their former relations of master and servant could not be effaced from Higgins's memory even by the terrifically changed life of the trenches. Although he was not Browne's batman, he still contrived in a way to look after Browne's comfort. The sense of responsibility still seemed to rest upon him. When "Our Jim" went "over the top" to lead a charge, Higgins was never far behind him. I suspect he had promised Helen to keep an eye on Browne. I know Helen exacted a promise from me to that effect.

"Shad," said Browne to me one day in his joking way, "if Higgins ever gets the V.C. for rescuing a wounded officer under fire, that officer will be me! Higgins has settled it in his own mind, and I'll have to submit."

I smile as I write this, for "words spoken in jest oft-times come home to roost," or whatever the saying is.

On July 1, 1916, came "the Push." The night before, Browne and I were sheltering in our dug-out endeavouring to snatch a few hours' sleep. We were not very successful, for the ceaseless roar of the guns, which were tearing the enemy's defences to bits and clearing the way for our advance on the morrow, was not soothing. Our conversation was fragmentary.

"I suppose we shall be making history to-morrow, Jimmy," I remarked.

"Yes, I suppose so," replied Browne. He was

silent for a few minutes, then he said: "Curious thing history is, when you come to think of it. For the main part it is just a record of intrigue and wars, just a record of evil. I wonder if somebody, sometime, will write a history recording the *good* mankind has done. Wouldn't that be a history worth reading and studying! The evil mankind has done should be buried out of sight and forgotten, not preserved and studied. It's about time we were learning that good alone is worthy of preservation." He was silent for a long time. Then he took a sealed letter from his jacket pocket, and handed it to me. "Shad, old boy," he said, "if—er—anything should happen to me to-morrow, will you—er—give this letter to Helen?"

Everybody knows about "the Push" on the Somme. No need for me to describe it. I only want to tell how our company "pushed" with the rest, and then—how Browne and I drifted out of it. It was on the second day of the forward movement. Our company had taken a section of the enemy's trenches which lay across the top of a small hill. It was an important position, for it commanded a long stretch of trenches to the left already occupied by our soldiers. Our colonel saw its importance, and sent orders to Browne to hold the section at all costs until reinforcements could be sent. The enemy were not slow to see its importance also, and a counter-attack soon developed. A battery got our range, and things began to happen. We had had but a short time to build up the opposite side of the captured trench, and soon two of our three machine-guns were smashed out of action. Our

men were wonderful, and "Our Jim" was here, there, and everywhere, but it was certainly a hot corner, and we needed help badly. Not many of our men were able to "carry on" when the enemy charged up the little hill. The crew of our remaining machine-gun were out of action. Browne and I

worked the gun for a while and stopped the mad rush of the enemy up the hill. Then the gun jammed, and the rush came on again. With feverish haste Browne worked to get the gun in action again, and despite the desperate nature of our situation, I remember thinking how like it was to



Even as I lay helpless, I saw Browne brush the blood from his eyes, grasp his revolver in his left hand, and stand over me.

Browne's struggles with "Fifi" in the old days when I stood by and handed things. Just as we began to fire again, a bomb came over the parapet, and the gun, Browne, and I were mixed up in dire confusion.

It could only have been for a moment that I lost consciousness, for as I opened my eyes, I saw Browne staggering to his feet. His jacket was torn open, his right hand and arm hung mangled at his side, and across his forehead a red furrow gushed and dripped down his face. I too tried to stand erect, but a sickening weakness toppled me back to the ground. Even as I lay helpless, I saw Browne brush the blood from his eyes, grasp his revolver in

his left hand, and stand over me. Then I saw something else. I saw Higgins standing on the parapet with an armful of bombs. With careful precision, much as a man would pitch quoits, he was lobbing them into the ranks of the enemy, who had almost topped the ridge. His cap was off, his face was streaked with blood and dust, and with each bomb delivered to the enemy he sent a greeting which was neither soothing nor respectful. Higgins the valet had disappeared, the servant mask was off, I saw Higgins the man! I remember wondering in a dazed way where he got the bombs. I learned later that he had found them in a dug-out deserted by the enemy. I counted the bombs as he threw them. There were six, and then his supply was exhausted. Even then he remained on the parapet, hurling stones and defiance at the foe.

Suddenly, through a darkening film which seemed to be gathering over my sight, I saw a burly form appear on the parapet opposite Browne. It held a bomb poised in its hand. The intention of the man with the bomb was perfectly clear even to my dulled comprehension. He intended to scatter Browne and the rest of us to the localities known as the "four winds." "All over," was the thought which passed through my mind, and I fancy I must have spoken the words aloud. Then I saw Higgins spring forward. His left fist feinted towards the stomach of the burly foe; instinctively the hand holding the bomb came down to protect the stomach; Higgins's right fist shot out and caught the burly one on the jaw. He toppled backwards among his comrades, and the bomb exploded. From

the noise and yells on the other side, it was evident that the bomb was an excellent and efficient one.

I heard Higgins's yell of delight, but I could not see him; the film before my eyes was getting very dark. As from a long way off, I heard him cry:

"The Croydon knock-out! 'Ow do you like it? You'd try to bomb 'Our Jim,' would you?"

And he said a great deal more. Clearly Higgins was letting himself go. The restrained emotions of years of valeting was finding vent. It was a revelation to hear him, but it was more joyful to hear the cheers of the reinforcements who at that critical moment dropped into our trench. Again I tried to stand erect, but my right leg was strangely numb. Browne tried to hold me up, but he too was shaky, and we both went to earth. I was very tired and sleepy. It seemed absurd to be sleepy when there was so much to be done, but—but——

When I opened my eyes again, I was lying on a cot, and a woman's face was bending over me. A strong odour pervaded the place.

"What is it?" I asked weakly.

"What's what?" asked the woman.

"That beastly smell!" I replied.

"Oh, that's iodoform," she said, laughing. Then she put her arm under my neck and lifted me up. "Drink some of this," she said.

I drank; then my head sank back on to the pillow, and I laughed, laughed, laughed!

"Good boy!" said the nurse approvingly.

"Do you know why I am laughing?" I asked.

She shook her head.

" I am thinking of Billy Green and old ' One-minute ' Barker ! "

Then I laughed and laughed again.

" That's right," said nurse. " Keep smiling ! "

CHAPTER XVI

BROWNE was discharged from hospital some considerable time before I was. It took longer to save a cracked leg than it did to amputate a shattered arm. There were also sundry pieces of bomb and splinters of machine-gun scattered in my anatomy which had to be located and coaxed out, and it took time and an amazing lot of X-raying to do it. The surgeon said mine was a very interesting case. He did not say why, nor go into professional details, but I imagine he was puzzled to know why I continued weak with so much iron tonic embedded in my system. I sometimes think my obstinate case shattered his faith in iron tonic as an invigorator. At any rate, he got the iron out of my system as quickly as possible, much to his relief and mine, and from thenceforward I grew gradually stronger.

Long before I was able to leave the hospital, Browne had grown accustomed to his artificial right hand and forearm. He used to visit me and exhibit his dexterity. Clad with a glove, the artificial hand was a very decent substitute, and there were all sorts of ingenious levers and springs which enabled him to grasp articles and move the hand and arm with almost lifelike action. He said he could even shake hands with it, but he found most people

preferred his left hand. Helen told me she sobbed a bit when she first touched it.

"Shad, dear," she said one day, "it seems to me sometimes that this horrible war is nothing but an evil dream. The world has been eating too much mince-pie and toasted cheese; it's just asleep and dreaming, and we shall all wake up presently to find there isn't a bit of truth in it!"

"And then?" I asked.

"Then we shall stay awake, and think better thoughts, and do better things, and old nightmare war will vanish for ever."

"Even the memory of it?" I asked drowsily.

"Even the memory of it," replied Helen, kissing me.

"Then I'll never eat mince-pie again," I murmured, trailing away into a peaceful, dreamless sleep, for it was time for my afternoon nap. We slept by schedule at that hospital.

The place of my temporary detention was a spacious mansion fitted up as a hospital for wounded officers, and some of its windows overlooked Hyde Park. Propped up in my bed, I could see the trees, and ere the time came to leave the hospital I had seen the leaves change from their summer green to the warmer tints of autumn, and then fall with gentle hesitation to carpet the grass beneath.

One day Billy Green brought "Jimmy" to visit me. I had not seen "Jimmy" for over a year, not since he had whined and kissed me good-bye at the station. I do not know how Green got "Jimmy" past the doorkeeper at the hospital. There was a rule against the admission of dogs. Perhaps he

bribed the doorkeeper, or perhaps the doorkeeper owned a dog himself and had a fellow-feeling for me. I prefer to think the latter was the reason. Anyway, "Jimmy" found his comrade again, and laughed and wagged and sobbed his joy in my arms. I do not know whether "Jimmy" or I expressed the greater joy. From our demonstrations, Green said, he judged it was "fifty-fifty," which he translated to mean "split even."

"Jimmy" came to see me many times thereafter. The surgeon and nurses knew of his visits, but made no protest. I think the surgeon, who was a broad-minded man, must have made a study of the effect of "canine tonic" on my interesting case, and have come to the conclusion that its effect was good. It would not surprise me to read some day in the *Lancet* an exhaustive treatise on "Canine Cures for Convalescents," written by that kindly surgeon.

As the days and weeks of my enforced idleness dragged on, the dull monotony of waiting to be well was hard to bear. Reading became a bore, games a weariness, my conversation, and that of my fellow wounded officers, lagged and degenerated finally to daily inquiries about our physical conditions, then faded away to yawns, silence, and smoke. So I used mostly to lie in my bed or sit in a wheelchair at my window, and let my thoughts roam at random.

Helen sympathized with me in my bored condition. She came as often as possible to cheer me up. One day, after Helen had been to visit me, I awoke from my afternoon nap at the scheduled time. On the table at my bedside lay a familiar

object which I had not seen for over two years. It was a paper pad, and beside it lay a newly sharpened pencil. Back went my thoughts to other days, days when the world was at peace, days when I sat working at my desk by the latticed window with "Jimmy" curled up in his chair near-by, and where, as I glanced through my window, I could see the brave little almond-tree cheerfully living its lonely life amid the bricks and mortar which hemmed it in. How long ago it all seemed. So much had happened since then. My thoughts began to wander further into the past, gliding hither and thither. Memories grave and gay passed in review. Then some merry imp of mischief guarding the gateway of thought began to admit memories tinged with humour and mixed up mostly with Browne. Smiling at these memories, I took the pad and pencil from the table at my bedside, and began to "drift" (with Browne).

Months have passed since then. As I write these words, I am at home again in my chambers, feeling very fit, and according to Jarvis, looking so too. The slight limp which mars the harmony of my walk will never quite disappear, so the surgeon thinks, but then, as Browne says, one would rather have a leg with a limp than a limp without the leg.

To-day has been rather an interesting one. Browne has received his majority, and Higgins (a sergeant now) was summoned to Buckingham Palace to receive the V.C., for his splendid bravery was too conspicuous to remain unrewarded. When I heard that Higgins was to receive the V.C. I expressed my gratification to Browne.

"He well deserves it," said Browne, "and I made the recommendation as strong as possible. I saw to it also that he received his sergeant stripes."

"Won't it feel a trifle odd having a V.C. valet after the war is over?" I asked.

"Much too odd," replied Browne. "Higgins and I will never resume the relations of master and servant. Men who have faced the Shadow together can never thereafter be anything but equals. Class distinction after all is only a social law made by mankind for purposes ill-defined and vague. It melts away in the presence of death and danger. It is a law lacking divine authority. It cannot stand in the presence of the Supreme Judge. I have thought it over. Higgins will go into business when the war is over. His courage has been proven, and I believe he has intelligence to back it. Courage and intelligence are useful assets in business."

Browne, Helen, and I went down to the gates of Buckingham Palace to see Higgins emerge with his decoration. There was quite a little cheer from an assembled group of his friends as Higgins marched proudly forth with the bronze cross pinned to his jacket. His friends claimed and bore him away, but not before he had promised to come to my chambers for tea.

As we sauntered slowly along the Mall, Helen seemed occupied with her thoughts, so much so that Browne finally offered her the usual penny for them.

"I was just wondering," said Helen.

"About what?" asked Browne.

"I was wondering why those who have decora-

tions to bestow never seem to have enough to go round."

Browne laughed.

"Decorations, Helen dear, are like bullets from a machine-gun during a charge. We either get one or we don't. When we are missed, let us be grateful. A decoration takes a lot of living up to. Think what the company will expect of poor Higgins when he returns to the front with the V.C. ! Besides, you forget that I have already received the R.A.O., and that ought to be decoration enough for any man with reasonable ambition."

"I didn't know you had received the R.A.O.," said Helen eagerly. "What is the R.A.O. ?"

"Right Arm Off," replied Browne, chuckling.

"Oh, Jimmy !" remonstrated Helen. Tears welled up in her eyes as she laid her hand caressingly on his artificial arm.

"And you know, Helen," I said, "your brother, Shad, has not been forgotten. The doctor says I am to be a K.P.L."

"Whatever is a K.P.L. ?" asked Helen, smiling through her unshed tears.

"Knight of the Perpetual Limp."

"You absurd children," cried Helen, linking her arms in ours. "Come along with mother and be punished. You shall have none of Mrs. Jarvis's tea-cakes !"

My rooms were rather crowded at tea-time, and Mrs. Jarvis was very busy caring for us all. Higgins did not turn up, and it was only after most of my guests had departed that Mrs. Jarvis informed me of the reason for his non-appearance. It seems his

courage failed when he arrived at my chambers, and he begged Mrs. Jarvis to allow him to have his tea below-stairs. He had had his tea with Mr. Jarvis, and they were chatting together over their pipes. When Browne heard this, he asked Mrs. Jarvis to have Higgins come up. Higgins came. The sergeant stripes were on his arms, and the little bronze cross was pinned to the breast of his khaki jacket, but his demeanour was a strange mixture of soldier and servant. Of my guests, only Browne and Helen, Aunt Lorina, Billy Green, and Mr Witherspun remained. Higgins, with cap in hand, seemed undecided whether to stand at attention or remove the tea-things.

"Sit down, Higgins," said Browne.

"Thank you, sir," said Higgins; "I would rather stand."

"Attention!" ordered Browne sharply. "Sit down, Sergeant Higgins!"

Higgins saluted and sat down stiffly on the edge of a chair.

"Parade is dismissed," said Browne, laughing. "Now, Higgins, Mr. Green and Mr. Witherspun want to hear how you got the V.C. Carry on."

"Yes, sir," said Higgins, settling back into his chair, but still looking somewhat embarrassed; "you see, we 'ad to 'old the trench. So I finds some bombs in a dug-out the 'Uns had left, and I lets 'em 'ave a few. And—and—that's all, sir."

It was not a vivid description. It was not calculated to arouse human emotions, and Higgins was a very surprised man when he suddenly found himself the centre of a group of people expressing

their emotions in various ways. Helen and Aunt Lorina laughed and cried and shook his hand. Mr. Witherspun clapped him on the shoulders and shook his hand. Billy Green thrust a box of cigars under his arm and shook his hand with a grasp that made



"For he's a jolly good fellow!"

Higgins wince. It was Browne who started to sing "For he's a jolly good fellow!" We all sang it, and "Jimmy" barked it, and when we had finished we all shook his hand again. It was a flushed and agitated Higgins who finally stumbled out of my room to calm his excitement with one of Green's cigars at Jarvis's fireside.

To-night I am sitting alone with "Jimmy" in front of my cheerful fire. To-morrow I go before a medical board for examination, and if they find me fit enough, I expect to return to the front in about a fortnight. Browne, much to Helen's joy, has been given a home billet for the time being.

It is a cold, wet night outside. The wind shrieks and rumbles in the chimney. It is very snug and cosy here in my easy chair. Clad in my warm dressing-gown, with slippered feet on the fender, I am reminded of the chilly, sombre day when I first took possession of my chambers and sat thus before the fire feeling so much at home, while Mrs. Jarvis arranged the table for tea. The home feeling is strong upon me to-night. Then, as I gaze at the curling smoke of my cheerful fire, a scene begins to evolve, a picture of rain-sodden trenches with mud-begrimed men standing guard. It is very comfortable here, but as I gaze at that picture in the fire, I grow restless. Out there—out there—what is it Byron says ?

*The dead have been awakened, shall I sleep ?
 The world's at war with tyrants, shall I crouch ?
 The harvest's ripe, and shall I pause to reap ?
 I slumber not, the thorn is in my couch,
 Each day a trumpet soundeth in mine ear,
 Its echo in my heart.*

* * * * *

A month has elapsed since I wrote the words above. I am fit. The medical board has finally passed me. I have received my captaincy. Tomorrow I leave to join my regiment.

Billy Green has just been here. He breezed in half an hour ago to tell me that the long-looked-for event has occurred. "Uncle Sam" has drawn the sword in the cause of liberty and humanity. I have never seen Green so excited. He paced the floor, talking, gesticulating, and puffing his cigar furiously.

S

The presence of a cigar between Green's lips never interferes with his flow of speech.

"Tramp, tramp, tramp, the boys are marching, Shad! We are allies now! You can't realize just what this means to me and other Americans over here. If we hadn't come in, I'd feel like growing a full set of whiskers to disguise my Star-Spangled Banner features! Only, I reckon my accent would give me away. You can't lose your accent simply by mislaying your safety razor. But it's all right now! I can talk American right out loud, for we are coming, Shad, coming, millions strong to stand beside you boys and see it through! Lord! how I wish some beauty specialist could lop twenty years off this old carcass of mine! Sergeant Higgins, V.C., would find that Private Billy Green was some bomb-slinger, believe me! I used to be a base-ball player years ago. I'm off now to see friend Witherspun. He and I are going to start an Anglo-American something-or-other. We don't know what it's to be just yet, but whatever it is, it's going to be for the benefit of the boys in khaki both now and when they 'come marching home again'! And let me tell you, Shad, the wheels of our organization are not going to be clogged with 'red tape.' Witherspun and Green have shaken hands on that! Witherspun's a fine man. He's got an iron will, but he keeps it lubricated with the oil of kindness, and it doesn't get rusty. A rusty iron will is only another name for pig-headedness. Good-bye, see you off at the station to-morrow. What brand of Havanas do you like best?"

When Green had departed (he was too full of

enthusiasm to stop long in one place), I sat down to ponder over the good news he had brought, and to read the President's message. "Tramp, tramp, tramp, the boys are marching!" Millions of our kinsmen are coming to stand shoulder to shoulder with us, so that liberty, justice, and humanity may not perish from the earth. How right Browne was when he said that this is no ordinary war between nations. How the entrance of the Great Republic seems to elevate and broaden the ideals for which we are struggling. It is no longer merely for "King and Country," no longer for the games of diplomats, no longer for national, individual, or Royal glory that we are fighting. It is for the emancipation of mankind! Therefore, the battles will be fought and won, not alone on the trench-gashed soil of France and Flanders and farther fields, but also in the inner consciousness of all who desire to stand for freedom and truth and right. Thus only will the real victory of peace be won. Then the evil dream of war, as Helen called it, will cease. We shall wake to saner thoughts, to purer ideals, to nobler attainments, and the memory of old nightmare war will vanish away, even as Helen has said. Until then, comrade "Jimmy," we must carry on, we must see it through. "Jimmy," sitting by my side, whines and licks my hand, and his great brown eyes gaze deeply into mine. I know he will do "his bit," even as millions of brave human hearts in lonely homes the world over are doing theirs. He, even as they, will love and wait.

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